THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

NOVEMBER, 1956

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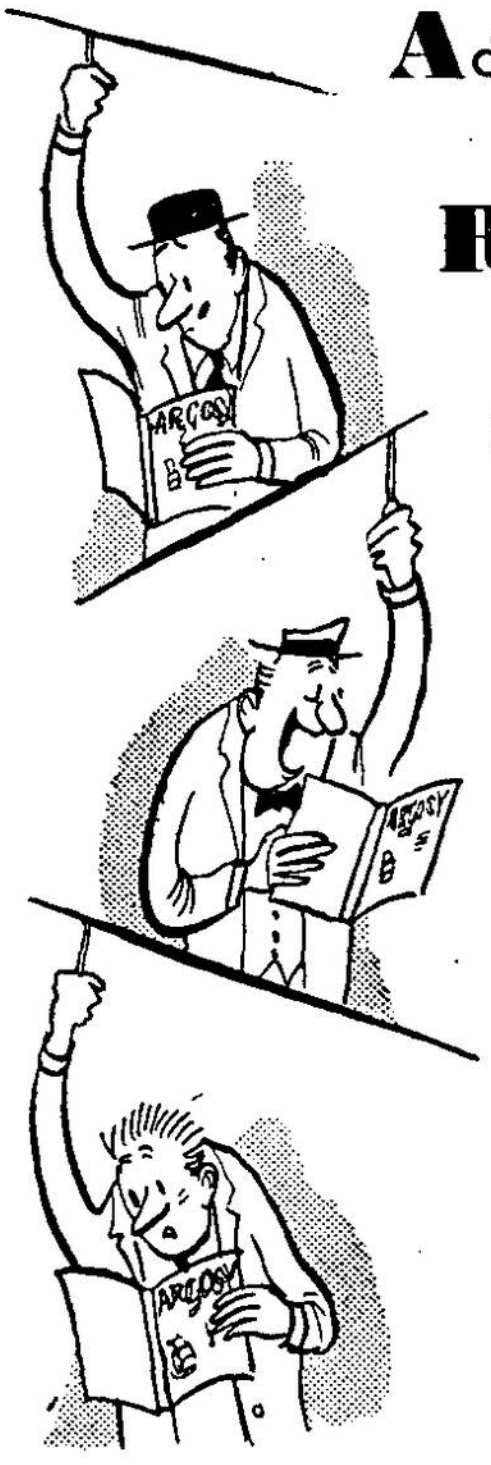

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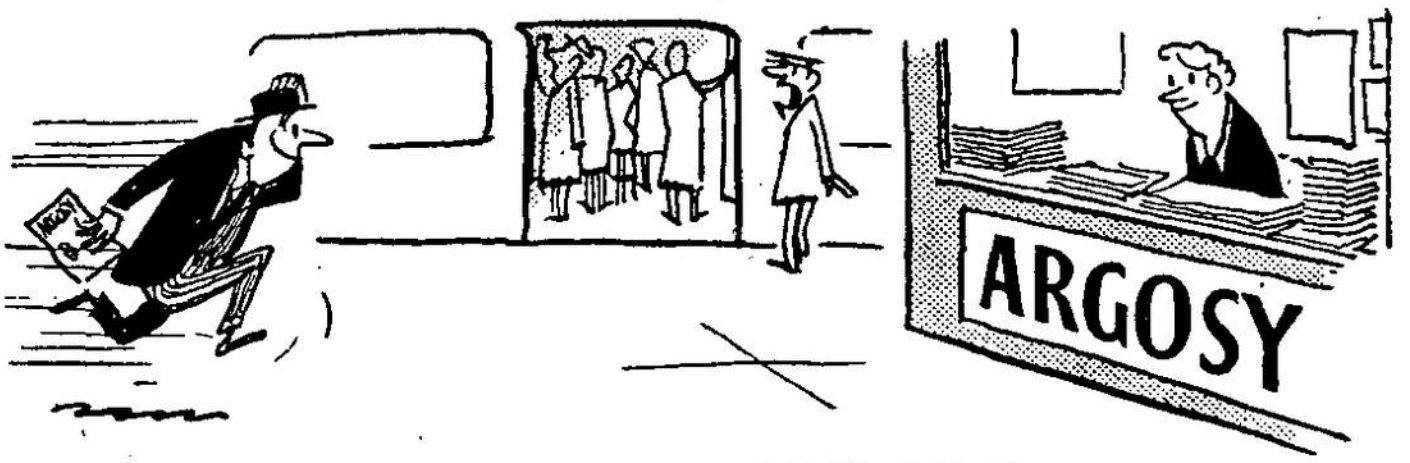

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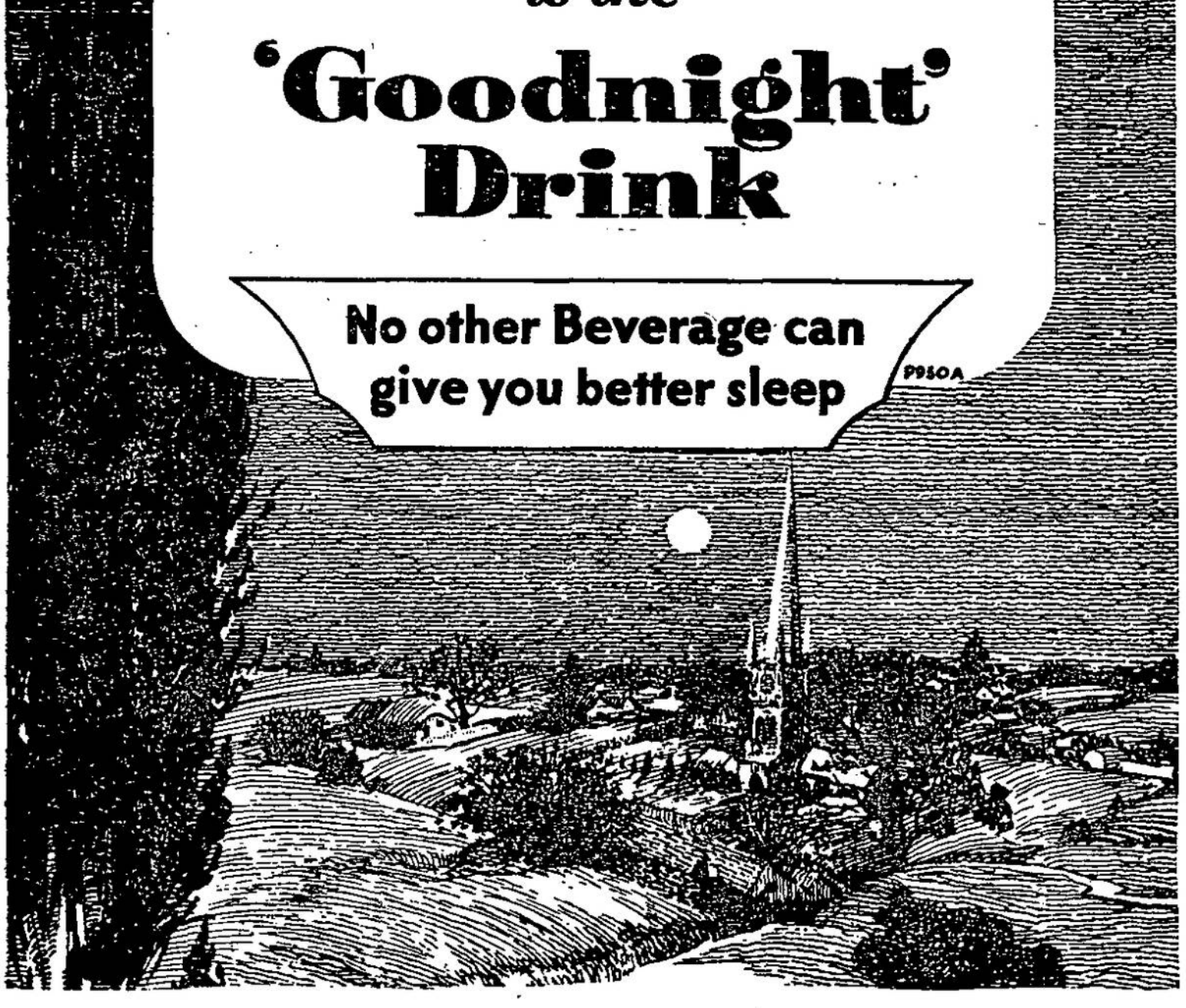

ARGOSY

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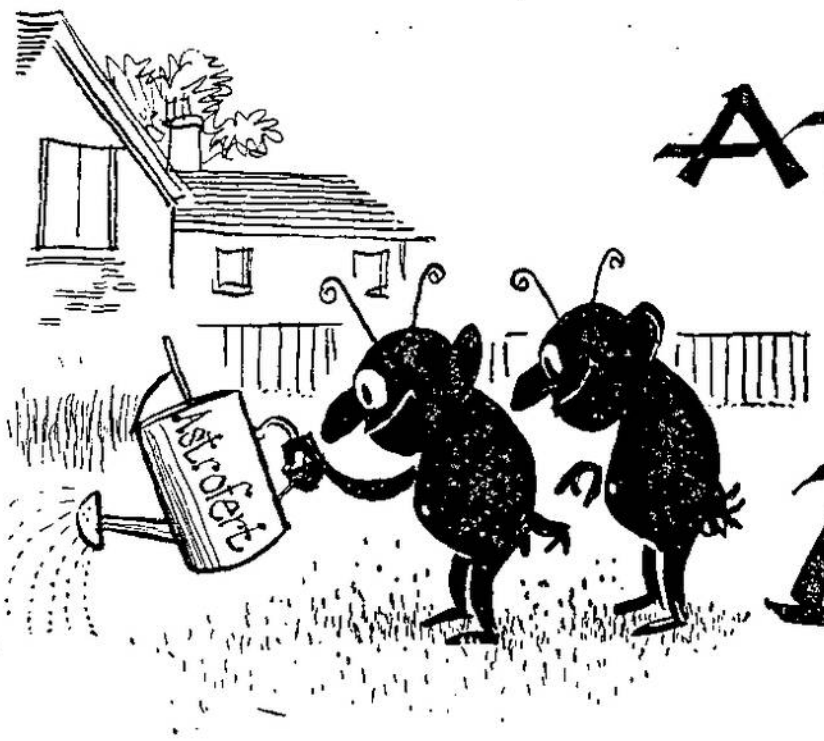


ARGOSY Log Book

HOW delightful it is to return home after a holiday!—to look forward to the prospect of a cup of tea properly brewed, a night in one's own bed, and the exhilarating plunge into snug old office routine tomorrow morning.

It is a pity, of course, about the peculiarly malign influence that seems to take over in a house as soon as the owner is absent: why, for instance, should the weeds in the front path begin to grow at twice their normal rate for two weeks each year? And why should a special, extra-thick brand of dust settle when the family's away? One is tempted to believe that tiny space-men from Mars have been using the house as an experimental base, growing cultures of Martian mould on the bit of Danish Blue accidentally left out on the kitchen table. The lawn, or what used to be the lawn, is a tangled, two-foot jungle which the Martians have plainly been sprinkling with Astrofert, and they've cracked the pantry window with their space-guns.

One can't attribute the knee-deep pile of bills to Martians; they seem to come from the usual familiar sources, and the fact that there isn't a single letter to leaven them must be put down to the fact that we bombarded our friends with cards from the Costa Brava, so they know we've been away.

Never mind: at the bottom of the heap there's a new, shiny Argosy. Let the children scythe the lawn, they've only one pair of legs each to lose, while father sinks deep into *Ice Cold in Alex.*

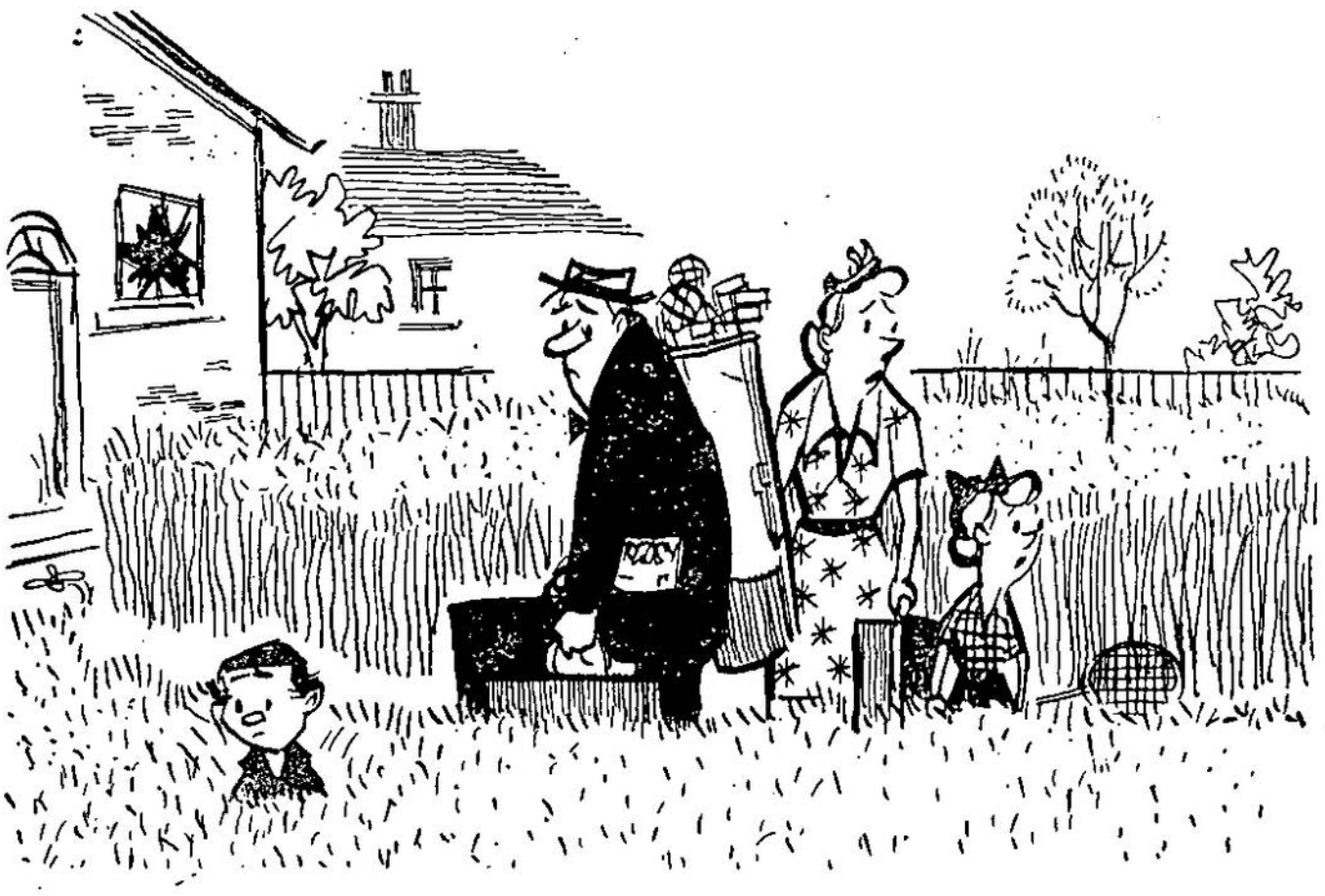
Autumn's nearly upon us, and back to work go our strap-hanging readers (you can see a picture of them on the inside cover). As you jolt on your way to the office, think over the merits of the stories you've just read in this issue of Argosy and then write us an advertising slogan. It can lead off with any phrase you like,

but the body of the slogan, as in our own advertisement, must consist of six phrases beginning with the initials **A-R-G-O-S-Y.** Send your slogans to The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, London E.C.4, by November 10. The one we like best nets a prize of two guineas.

Michael Gilbert writes some of today's wittiest detective fiction: sleuthing with a sparkle is definitely his speciality. We're delighted to announce a new series of his stories, specially written for Argosy, dealing with the activities of the resourceful Detective Petrella, well versed, in every sense of the word, in the vagaries of the odd characters he meets on his beat.

Gilbert, who is forty-four, has four daughters, Harriett, Victoria, Olivia, and Kate, and a brand-new son. He lives with his family in a Kentish rectory, finds his interest in crime a stimulus in his profession (he is a solicitor), and his legal knowledge of great value in writing his thrillers.

Mary Lee Settle, gifted young American writer, is the wife of the poet Douglas Newton, and has one son. She was raised in the Kentucky and West Virginia mountains, came to England in 1942 to join the W.A.A.F., and liked it so much that, after a year back in the U.S. working on Harper's Bazaar, she returned to live in London. She's in America at present, is engaged in writing a series of four historical novels dealing with the American South. She is best known in this country for her brilliant first

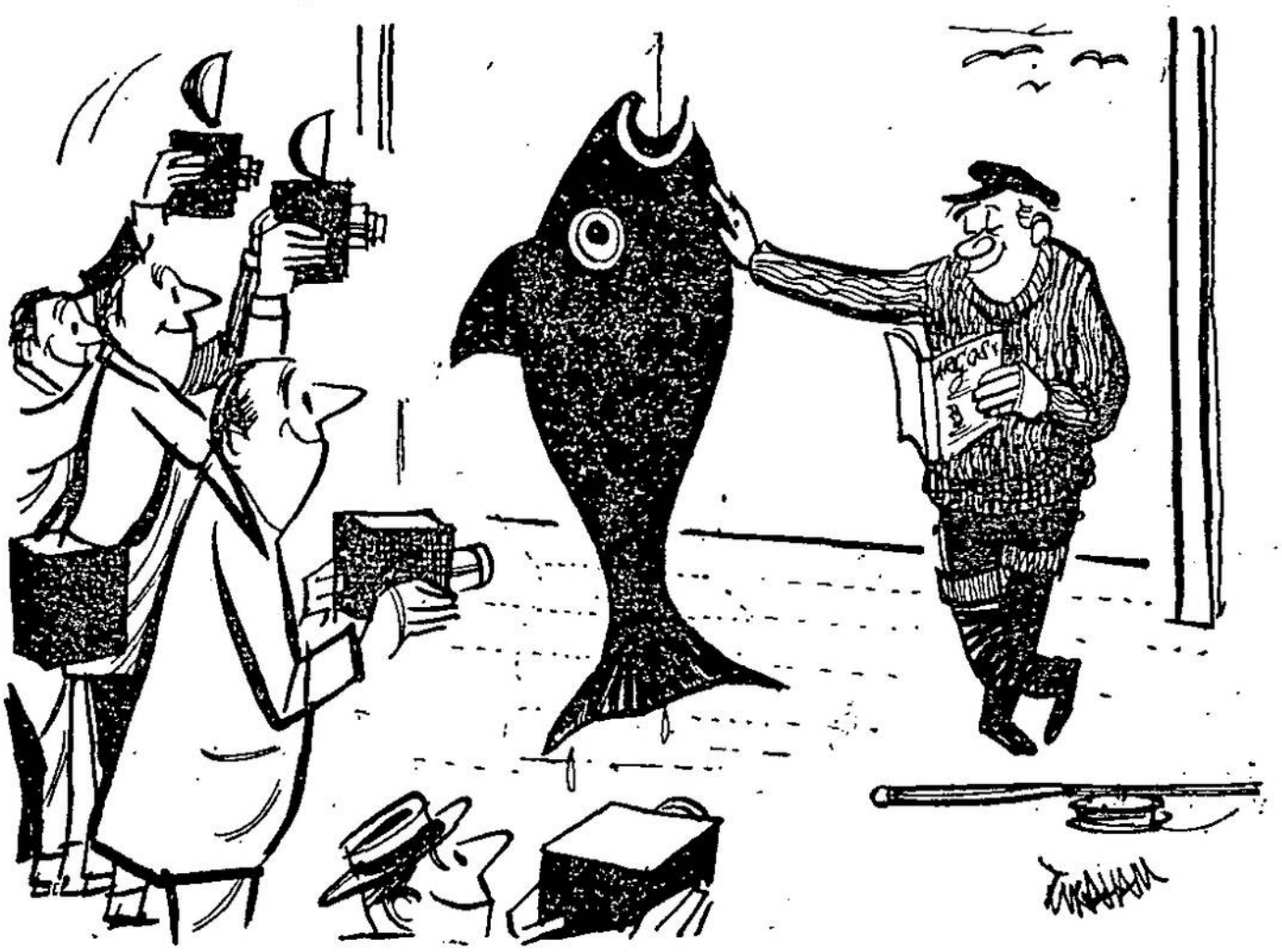


novel, *The Love Eaters*, and its runner-up, *The Kiss of Kin*, in both of which she turns a sharp but affectionate eye on her native land. Her new novel comes out next month.

James Norman is American, aged forty-four. During the 'thirties he was European correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, later was a war correspondent in the Pacific and won the Bronze Star. Now he lives in Mexico, writing and teaching literature. His thrillers are well known, particularly *The Nightwalkers* and *Murder Chop Chop*, both set in China.

Edward Lindall is the pen-name of Edward Smith, Australian journalist, who lives in Adelaide. He had a varied wartime career, was at Tobruk and El Alamein, after the war worked in the London office of the Melbourne Herald; he says his great ambition is to live in England again.

John Inglis Hall, born beside Lake Windermere, says his family contained many eccentrics but also some reasonable people, including Lafcadio Hearn, the famous writer on Japan. Inglis Hall, who is married and has three boys, is a public-relations executive in one of Britain's largest electrical-engineering corporations. He has written since early youth, mostly short stories, but also one book of poetry, *Write Me a Little Horse*.



WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND?

Petrella noticed blood
—freshly dried, inside the lip

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

TO Superintendent Haxtell, education was something you dodged at school and picked up afterwards as you went along.

" All I need in my job," he would say, " I learnt in the street." And he would glare down at Detective Petrella, whom he had once found improving his mind with Dr. Bentley's *Dissertation on Fallacies* at a time when he should have been thumbing his way through the current number of *Hue & Cry*.

Petrella was, of course, an unusual Detective Constable. He spoke three languages—one of them was Arabic, for he had been brought up in Egypt; knew about subjects like viniculture and the theory of the five-lever lock; and had an endlessly inquiring mind.

The Superintendent approved of that. " Curiosity," he said. " Know your people. If you don't know, ask questions. Find out. It's better than book-learning."

Petrella accepted the rebuke in good part. There was a lot of truth in it. Most police work was knowledge; knowledge of an infinity of small, everyday facts, unimportant by themselves, deadly when taken together.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the Superintendent, Petrella retained an obstinate conviction that there were other things as well, deeper things and finer things: colours, shapes, and sounds of absolute beauty, unconnected with the world of small people in small houses in grey streets. And while in one pocket of his old raincoat he might carry Moriarty's *Police Law*, in the other would lie, dog-eared with use, the *Golden Treasury* of Palgrave.

" *She walks in beauty, like the night Of cloudless climes and*

ARGOSY'S EXCITING NEW
★ MICHAEL GILBERT SERIES ★

starry skies," said Petrella, and, " That car's been there a long time. If it's still there when I come back it might be worth looking into."

He was on his way to Lavender Alley to see a man called Parkoff about a missing bicycle. It was as he was walking down Barnaby Passage that he forgot poetry and remembered that he was a policeman.

For something was missing. Something as closely connected with Barnaby Passage as mild with bitter or bacon with eggs. The noise of the Harrington children at play.

There were six of them, and Barnaby Passage, which ran alongside their back garden, was their stamping-ground. On the last occasion that Petrella had walked through it, a well-aimed potato had carried away his hat, and he had turned in time to see the elfin face of Micky Harrington disappear behind a row of dustbins. He had done nothing about it, first because it did not befit the dignity of a plain-clothes detective to chase a small boy, and secondly because he would not have had the smallest chance of catching him.

Even when not making themselves felt, the Harrington family could always be heard. At school? No, too late. In bed? Much too early. Away somewhere? The Harrington family rarely went away. And if by any chance they had moved, that was something he ought to know about, for they were part of his charge.

Six months ago, he had helped to arrest Tim Harrington. It had taken three of them to do it. Tim had fought because he knew what was coming to him. It was third time unlucky and he was due for a full stretch.

Mrs. Harrington had shown only token resentment at this sudden removal of her husband for a certain nine and a possible twelve years. He was a man who took a belt to his children and a boot to his women. Not only when he was drunk, which would have been natural, and forgivable, but with cold ferocity when sober.

Petrella paused at the corner, where the blank walls of Barnaby Passage opened out into Barnaby Row. It was at that moment that a line of Rossetti came into his head. *Who has seen the wind?* he murmured to himself. *Neither you nor I.*

A casement rattled up and an old woman pushed out her head. " Lookin' for someone? "

" Er, good evening, Mrs. Minter," said Petrella politely. " I wasn't going to—that's to say, I wondered what had happened to Mrs. Harrington. You can usually hear her family."

" Noisy little bastards," said Mrs. Minter. But she said it

without feeling. Children and flies, hope and despair and dirt and love and death; she had seen them all from her little window.

"I wondered if they'd gone away."

"They're home," said Mrs. Minter. "And Mrs. Harrington." Her eyes were button-bright.

"Well, thank you," said Petrella. His mouth felt dry now that he found his suspicions suddenly come home.

"You're welcome," said Mrs. Minter.

As Petrella turned away he heard the window slamming down and the click of the bolt.

He climbed the steps. Signs of calamity were all about him: the brass dolphin knocker unpolished, the steps unwhited. A lace curtain twitched in the front window, and behind the curtain something stirred.

Petrella knocked. He had lifted the knocker a second time when it was snatched out of his hand by the sudden opening of the door, and Mrs. Harrington stood there.

She was still the ghost of the pretty girl Tim Harrington had married ten years before, but life and rough usage had sandpapered her down to something finer and smaller than nature had ever intended. Her fair hair was drawn tightly over her head and all her girl's curves were turning into planes and angles. Usually she managed a smile for Petrella, but today there was nothing behind her eyes but emptiness.

"Can I come in?" he asked.

"Well—yes, all right."

She made no move. Only when Petrella actually stepped towards her did she half turn to let him past her, up the dark, narrow hall.

"How are the children?" he asked—and saw for himself. The six Harrington children were all in the front room, and all silent. The eldest boy and girl were making a pretence of reading books, but the four younger ones were just sitting and staring.

"You're very quiet," he said. "Has the scissor man come along and cut all your tongues out?"

The eldest boy tried out a grin. It wasn't a very convincing grin, but it lasted long enough for Petrella to see some freshly dried blood inside the lip.

I can smell tiger, he thought. The brute's here all right. He must have made his break this afternoon. If it had been any earlier, the news would have reached the Station before I left it.

"I'd like a word with you," he said. "Perhaps you could ask the children to clear out for a moment." He looked at the door which led, as he knew, into the kitchen.

"Not in there," she said quickly. "Out into the hall."

Now that he knew, it was obvious. The smallest boy had his eyes glued to the kitchen door in a sort of dumb horror.

They shuffled out into the hall. Petrella said softly, " I'm not sure you hadn't better go too. There's going to be trouble."

She looked at him with sudden understanding. Then she said, in a loud, rough voice, " I don't know what you're talking about. If you've got anything to say, say it and get out. I got my work to do."

" All right," said Petrella. " If you want to play it that way." He was moving as he spoke. The door to the kitchen was a fragile thing. He ran at it, at the last moment swinging his foot up so that the sole of his heavy shoe landed flat and hard, an inch below the handle.

The door jumped backwards, hit something that was behind it, and checked. Petrella slid through the opening.

Tim Harrington was on his knees on the floor. The door edge had cut open his head, and on his stupid face he had the look of a boxer when the ring gets up and hits him.

Petrella fell on top of him. He was giving away too much in weight and strength and fighting experience for any sort of finesse. Under his weight Harrington flattened for a moment, then braced himself, and bucked.

Petrella had his right arm in a lock round the man's neck, and hung on. Steel fingers tore at his arm, plucked it away, and the lumpy body jerked again, and straightened. Next moment they were both on their feet, glaring at each other.

In the front room the woman was screaming steadily, and a growing clamour showed that the street was astir. But in the tiny kitchen it was still a private fight.

Harrington swung on his heel and made for the window into the garden. For a moment Petrella was tempted. Then he jumped for the big man's legs, and they were down on the floor again, squirming and fighting and groping.

There was only one end to that. The bigger man carried all the guns. First he got Petrella by the hair and thumped his head on the linoleum. Then he shambled to his feet and, as Petrella turned onto his knees, swung a boot.

If it had landed square, that would have been the end of Petrella as a policeman, and maybe as a man as well; but he saw it coming and rolled to avoid it. And, in the moment that it missed him, plucked at the other foot. Harrington came down and in his fall brought the kitchen table with him. A bowl of dripping rolled onto the floor, spilling its brown contents in a slow and loving circle. Petrella, on his knees, watched it, fascinated.

Then he realized that he was alone.

His mind was working well enough to bring him to his feet but his legs seemed to have an existence of their own. They took him out into the front room, which was empty, and then into the hall.

He was dimly aware of the children, all staring at him, all silent. The door was open. In the street footsteps, running.

" You won't catch him now," said Mrs. Harrington.

He turned his head to look at her, and the sudden movement seemed to clear his brain. " I'm going after him," he said. " Ring the police."

Then he was out in the street, and running. Mrs. Minter shouted, " Down there, mister," and pointed. He stumbled, and righted himself. Harrington was already disappearing round the corner. Petrella shambled after him.

When he got to the corner there was one car in the road ahead of him and no one in sight. The car was moving, accelerating, a big blue four-door saloon. Too far away to see the number.

" Gone away! "

A second car drew up behind him, and a voice said politely, " Is there anything wrong? "

Petrella became aware that he was standing, swaying, in the middle of the road. Behind him, its bonnet inches from his back, was a neat little sports car in two shades of green, driven by a fat young man with fair hair and a Brigade-of-Guards moustache.

" Police," said Petrella. " Got to get after that car. It's stolen."

The blue saloon was turning into the High Street now. " Move over. I'll drive."

" Hop in," said the young man. " You don't look too fit. I'd better do the driving. It's a tricky little bus, this, till you get the hang of it."

" All right," muttered Petrella. " But quick."

The young man took him at his word. The little car jumped forward like a horse at the touch of a spur. They cornered into the High Street, under the nose of a bus, and shot down the middle of the crowded road.

The young man hardly seemed to have moved in his seat. He handled his car like a craftsman, insolently exact, both meticulous and careless at the same time.

" Right fork ahead. He's going up to the Heath, I think."

" His neck'll be for sale if he does much more of *that*," said the young man calmly. The blue saloon had pulled out, charged past a bus, and only just got back again ahead of the oncoming lorry.

" I say," said Petrella, " you can drive."

" Done a good deal of it," said the man. " Rally stuff mostly, a bit on the track. Name of Blech."

Petrella placed him then.

Time came, and time went, and they were off the Heath and making for the maze of small streets which fills the triangle between Hampstead, Regent's Park, and Camden Town.

" I'm a bit too light to ram him," said Blech. " No need, really. All we have to do is keep in sight. He'll do himself soon."

It happened as he was speaking. The road went up in a hump over the Canal. The blue saloon hit the rise so fast that it almost took off, came down threshing and screaming, went into a long sideways skid, hit the low parapet, and toppled over.

Blech came neatly to a halt, and Petrella was out, and running again.

The blue car was standing on its nose in three feet of water and mud, sinking ponderously. Petrella got the rear door open, and pulled. Behind him, Blech pulled. As the car fell away, the bulk of Tim Harrington tumbled back on top of them.

Petrella seized him by the hair and hammered his head on the tow-path.

He felt a restraining hand on his arm, and the mists cleared again for a moment. " I think," said Blech, " that you're being rather too—er—vigorous with him. What he wants is first aid, really."

" Sorry," said Petrella. " Not thinking very straight. Fact is, I think I'm a bit concussed myself."

" That makes two of you. If you helped, we might get him into my car."

They did this, between them. The street slept in a timeless summer's evening doze. From first to last no other person appeared on the scene.

" Where to now? "

Petrella tried to think. Harrington was out. There was a big purple bruise on one side of his forehead, and an occasional bubble formed in the corner of his open mouth. He was a hospital case. But no hospital would take him in without explanations. Nor would any other police station.

" Home," he said. " The way we came. It'll be quicker in the long run."

They drove home decorously, back up onto the Heath, and west, with the setting sun in their eyes. For a few seconds Petrella dozed. That wouldn't do. No time to sleep. Job not finished. Better talk and keep awake.

" It's very good of you," he said, " to take all this trouble."

" Enjoyed it," said Blech. " What is he? "

"He's an escaped convict," said Petrella. "Called Harrington. Not a pleasant character."

"How did you cotton on to him?"

How had he? It was so many years ago. A great gale was singing through his head, a mighty diapason of sound that came and went. "It was Rossetti put me on to him," he said, as the gale dropped for a moment.

"Rossetti? *The Blessed Damozel*—"

"Not Dante Gabriel, Christina. *Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I: But when the trees bow down their heads The wind is passing by.* Fork left here."

"That's nice," said Blech. "Is there any more of it?"

"*Who has seen the wind? Neither I nor you: But when the leaves hang trembling The wind is passing through.*" That was it. Hang trembling. It was the children that had made him certain. Sitting there like drugged mice.

"I must remember that," said Blech. "Here we are, I think. You'd better get some help to carry out our passenger. And then you ought to lie down, or something, I think."

Superintendent Haxtell reckoned that he was beyond surprise, but the events of that evening tried him hard. First there came two stalwart constables, supporting the drooping figure of a convict of whose escape in transit from one prison to another he had only just been notified; secondly a diffident figure, whose face he vaguely recognized from the columns of the popular press; and, bringing up the rear, his shirt torn open to the waist, his face rimmed with blood and dried dripping, Detective Petrella.

When he had sorted things out a bit, he sat down to make his report.

Plainly it was a case that reflected the greatest credit on all concerned. And a lot of it must, and should go to Petrella. And, according to Petrella, Blech had behaved very well. A foreigner, but a good chap. So far so good.

But what the Superintendent couldn't make out was exactly what credit was to be given to a person called Rossetti. Sounded like some sort of Italian. Some further inquiries needed there. His pen scratched busily . . .

★ ☆ ★

SHE'S MY MAYBE

Everything I know about her is merely daresay.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

ROOT SHOTS

Diminishing Returns

I've watered from the bottom;
I've watered from the top
I've added pills to water that they're drinking
Fluorescent lamps, north light and south,
My treatment is a flop
My violets are the genus known as shrinking.

GERTRUDE KILKEARY,
African Violet

Just Deserts

A lady we know . . . has had phenomenal success growing cactus plants indoors. Visiting her the other day, we asked her the secret of her triumph. "Well," she said, "I bought these plants in El Paso, so I subscribe to an El Paso paper, and every time it says it rained in El Paso, I give the cactuses a little water."

Geared, from *The New Yorker*

Bifocal

How small the contents of my greenhouse boxes
The young nemesias, salpiglossis, phloxes,
Viewed with the natural eye—but how immense
When I regard them through the reading lens!

But pride in their gigantic size gives way
To fear that their young lives will be a prey
To this enormous aphis, which I straight
With my Goliath thumb annihilate.

FREDA C. BOND

★ *By popular request this month's Argosy reprint is one of Robert Fontaine's sparkling Canadian comedies about Grandpa and his girl-friends*

WIDOW TRAP

BY ROBERT FONTAINE

GRANDPA used to plague my uncles as if they were small boys, urging them to stop drinking, to forget women, to consider the serious aspects of life. But he himself was no example.

When Papa would mention casually that a man of Grandpa's one hundred and five pounds should be careful of his adventures, Grandpa observed, " It is all muscle, you understand."

That Grandpa himself was not so confident in that muscle became apparent when he began to court the Widow LaChance.

He appeared, one evening, in the dining-room, as dapper and bright as a bowl of Maman's pansies. His skin was pink from rubbing and sparkled like the imitation diamond attached to his cravat.

He wore a white linen jacket, with only one slight stain from a brandy chocolate on it. He wore immaculate pale blue trousers. And he wore a sailor straw with a blue-and-white band. The hat was tilted at an angle that seemed to ignore gravity. He carried a yellow cane, which he twirled like the drum-major of the Governor General's Foot Guards.

He announced to the awed assembly in the room that he was en route " faire l'amour! "

In French, of course, to make love is to make love. It admits of no innocent interpretations.

We all laughed at this boast.

" It will be your death," noted my Uncle Felix. " Under such conditions the arteries . . . or is it the veins . . . ? "

" It will stop your teeth from aching," Papa interrupted.

Grandpa's eyes twinkled and he executed a little dance step.

" The one who knows of a better way to die, will he step forward? "

" You will knock your legs together and crack them with that dancing," my Uncle Desmonde laughed.

" I am two of you in every sense," Grandpa snorted. " On, then, to the beautiful Widow LaChance."

" The guillotine," Felix observed, " awaits."

Later, by discreet inquiries and some listening to confidential whispers, I learnt something about Grandpa's affairs with the Widow. He had a rival, it appeared, one Gunboat Hodge, a man who drove a team of brewery horses and who often won prizes for the largest chest expansion in Ontario.

Bending a crowbar was a pleasure to Gunboat, and frequently, at Sunday-school picnics, I had seen him lie on his back and permit large boulders to be broken on his stomach with a sledge-hammer.

Grandpa, at his age and weight, was no match for this monster.

My grandfather, apparently, did not know of his rival when he first began to court the Widow. My grandfather was, above all, wise. He was not a man to encourage violence, especially to his own delicate person. He was, in short, not the type for any sort of duel.

I asked Maman one day how Grandpa had met the Widow.

" It was at a church minstrel," she said soberly. " Grandpa sang *On the Road to Mandalay* and Madame LaChance was slightly moved. But when he danced the buck-and-wing, his sprightliness captivated her, even though he was in burnt cork."

" Ah, then," I surmised, " it is a good thing to know, this buck-and-wing? "

" Yes," Papa joined in, " it will be a comfort to you in your old age."

" But why," I asked, sincerely puzzled, " does Grandpa wish to love the Widow LaChance when, already, he loves "—here I began to count on my fingers—" Madame Frechete, the modiste; Mademoiselle Cocteau, the teacher of the ballet; Madame Pernod, the chanteuse; Mademoiselle McPhail . . ."

" Enough. Hold! " cried Papa. " You will be all day at that! "

" Is this, after all, something to discuss with a young boy? " Maman asked, a little upset.

" So," said Papa, " if he does not discuss it with us, he will discuss it with others less intelligent and with minds perhaps more evil."

My mother smiled gently. " Yes, perhaps. But in my day we did not discuss the love affairs of the grandfather with the grandson."

" A pity, too," Papa said.

" But why? " I persisted. " Why does Grandpa . . .? "

" With some people," my father explained, " it is butterflies. With your Uncle Desmonde it is ornate garters; with Felix it is

useless information; with Grandpa it is beautiful women over fifty."

"Ah, oui," I commented. This began to make sense.

"Over fifty, mind you," my father continued. He was now talking really to tease Maman, but he spoke to me. "Grandfather is not the one to go chasing after young girls. He knows his place in the scheme of amorous things. Nor is he the type of which one reads in the American Sunday papers, the ones in whose trunk are found, by the police, middle-aged torsos, previously insured for enormous sums."

"That," said Maman, "will be enough, dear."

After this discussion I sought an appointment with Grandpa in order to understand his attitude more completely.

We spoke of many things as he sipped his violet wine and rocked in his chair. At last we came to the point.

"It is like this," Grandpa explained. "I love the women in full bloom."

"Big?"

"Not big," Grandpa corrected. "Complete. It is as if one held up a rose to the light of the sun!" Grandpa raised his wine to the electric light. "Nothing more, you understand."

"Nothing more," I agreed, not knowing precisely what more there was.

"At fifty," Grandpa went on, warming to the subject, "a woman is perfect."

To me, it seemed a long time to wait, but I offered no comment, being satisfied at the revelations.

"At forty-five she is not yet fully developed. I am speaking now, of course, of the heart, the spirit, the mind. After fifty—let us say at fifty-five—she wilts. Comprends-tu?"

"Oui," I agreed. I saw in my mind long rows of women of fifty-five, their heads drooping like sunflowers.

"*Now*," Grandpa continued, "we have in Ottawa many women of fifty, at their choicest year. And we have so few men to give them appreciation. And why?"

"Why?"

"Because men old enough to appreciate them are already married and so have lost their sense of the appreciation of beauty. Or if by chance they are still single, they have ulcers of the stomach. There has never been a romantic man with ulcers of the stomach. It is impossible. I speak not with cynicism. I speak with compassion. My stomach is as cast iron."

Thus spake Grandpa.

Well, it was only after he had been to tea with the Widow

LaChance several times, admiring her Limoges and her Courbet, that he realized he had pointed his cane into a nest of hornets.

Gunboat, having taken a day off from disturbing the peace, rolling beer barrels noisily into cellars, called on the Widow.

He appeared, according to Grandpa, " in a tight-fitting seersucker suit which caused him to look like a large ox tongue which had been wrapped hastily in wrinkled brown paper by the butcher's small son. An oversize ox tongue wearing size twelve shoes. He had around his red neck a bow-tie attached with a band of elastic. His face was bright and rough from scrubbing, like a kitchen floor. In his hands, which were like bunches of long, wilted carrots, he carried pussywillows and a box of chocolates.

" When he saw me he placed the gifts on the table and shouted like a bull, ' Who is this? '

" The dear lady replied, ' This is a charming raconteur who amuses me enormously.'

" ' A what? ' bellowed the bull.

" ' Pray be seated,' Madame LaChance requested graciously.

" For the next two hours "—Grandpa is still speaking—" I talked rapidly and for the most part in French, which Monsieur Gunboat does not comprehend except when it is profane. I spoke about the painting of Monet, the music of Debussy, and the French Chamber of Deputies. I imagined this would cause Monsieur Gunboat to fall asleep. It did not, alas. He is possessed of an amazing resistance. In fact, listening to my own buzz, it was *I* who began to doze."

Not so long after, we learnt that Gunboat had become very jealous and had sworn on a barrel of Black Horse Ale to remove Grandpa from competition, if not from the very face of the earth.

When I mentioned the matter to Grandpa, his hundred-odd pounds quivered slightly, but his face remained calm.

Men have died, he quoted mysteriously, *and the worms have eaten them. But not for love.*

Gunboat, however, apparently realized that he would have no thanks from Madame LaChance if he broke Grandpa's brittle bones. Gunboat's approach was subtle. He caused to appear at our house one day a belle whom Grandpa had once courted briefly. This belle claimed loudly that Grandpa had promised, in legible writing, to marry her.

Grandpa, whose memory was poor and whose imagination, when penning billets-doux, was excellent, did not deny the charges. Instead, he served Mademoiselle Finklewort a fine champagne, showed her his collection of military buttons and his ribbon of the French Legion of Honour. He inquired if Mademoiselle Finklewort had ever considered displaying her radiant

beauty to a larger public than her circle of friends, by appearing on the stage. He kept referring to her, casually, as Comtesse, as though confusing her with some highborn lovely. In the end, the object of her visit forgotten, Mademoiselle Finklewort bade Grandpa au 'voir as he kissed her hand, his back creaking audibly.

Gunboat did not relent. In a few weeks Grandpa found himself gaily defending his reputation in the District Court.

A gaudy young thing, on whom, Grandpa insisted, he had never set eyes, was the plaintiff. Grandpa enjoyed himself thoroughly, proving to the judge that the charming young lady in question was the mother of two children of doubtful origin and that she had been twice arrested and convicted of stealing.

In the end, Grandpa emerged victorious, his photograph appearing eventually in the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Le Droit*.

Gunboat, in his frustration, now became psychologically morbid. In what was intended to be a war of nerves, he began posting Grandfather weird and frightening objects. The gifts included a dead mouse, a live owl—Gunboat's mother, bewitched, Grandpa said—the shrunken skull of a cannibal, and a number of other choice relics. Grandpa was merely amused. He had owned a life-size skeleton for years.

He began to receive telephone calls from a gipsy with a wavering, gloomy voice and a cockney accent who predicted dire happenings to Grandpa if he did not leave the province.

Up to a point, Grandpa thought all this rather entertaining. But he was, after all, a man of taste and refinement. He was not used to long-drawn-out adventures. His true delight was in the crisp, the incisive, the subtle, and the spontaneous. "To tell the truth," he explained one night, "I am become bored with this rhinoceros. Were Madame LaChance not so lovely I might give her up for some less difficult beauty. Unfortunately, I am terribly attached to the Widow. Also, I have not *met* any other beauty lately. There seems, then, nothing to do but eliminate Monsieur Gunboat!"

"A duel, eh?" Papa said.

"Champagne corks at ten paces," Desmonde suggested.

"A champagne cork," Felix said, "will not travel ten paces with any effect."

"I have my own methods," Grandpa said darkly.

"I hope you'll be careful not to hurt anybody," Maman said.

"Not myself, anyway," cackled Grandpa.

Now, Gunboat was a man of strict habits, Grandpa had discovered. He knew Gunboat always came to Madame LaChance's by the same route through a dark wood in Ottawa East, and at the same hour. Grandpa planned to trap Gunboat—literally.

He took me into conference, without appointment, one day, making me draw a cross with the blood pricked from my thumb and swear not to tell a soul the things that were to be revealed.

I swore and became an accomplice.

Together we journeyed to Ottawa East shortly afterwards and constructed a beartrap. It was, of course, really a mantrap.

We dug a pit, as I had learnt from books on hunting big game —a very, very deep pit. Its final triumph was a firm mesh of heavy wire, followed by enormous iron bars, both of which we had carried to the scene in a borrowed truck.

The entire weight of the bars and the wire came down after the trap had closed and made escape impossible without aid.

Fortunately, Grandfather had sense enough to place food and water in the pit. He intended, he explained, to leave Gunboat in the trap for a few days, until he was sufficiently frightened never to bother the Widow again. Then the rival was to be released.

We waited in the darkness beside the trap.

" Does this hurt your conscience? " Grandpa whispered.

" Not if it works," I replied solemnly.

It was pitch dark when we thought we observed Gunboat. Unfortunately, as it proved later, we were so eager to spring the trap and watch our masterpiece work that we did not have our wits sharpened to their keenest points. But spring the trap we did. Then we drove hastily back to Ottawa to establish an alibi.

It was three days later that Grandfather, rather jumpy, telephoned the police in a falsetto voice, squeaking that the brewer's missing man could be found in the wood in Ottawa East.

Grandfather, of course, had been too nervous to go near the Widow during Gunboat's absence. It was just as well. He would not have found the Widow at home.

She was down in the pit with Gunboat.

A month later it was announced that the Widow LaChance and Gunboat were to be married. When we told the news to Grandfather he was philosophic. He twirled the waxed ends of his moustache and said, " After all, when a man and woman spend four days together in a cave—four days and four *nights*—without a chaperon, there is nothing much they can do but get married."

He reached for one of his brandy chocolates and bit into it.

" You know, of course," he observed casually, " that she wore a wig? "

★ ★ ★

When you have finished reading this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

FETCH HER AWAY

The room was charming
—with the light on

BY THEODORA BENSON

FOR one reason or another my foreign currency did not last as long as expected, and I came back while my flat was still let. I spent the first night of my return at a friend's house, but wanted somewhere of my own for the rest of the week before my tenant was due to depart; I had work to finish.

The Motor Show was on and London was exceedingly full. I was lucky to hear of a nice young couple, friends of friends of mine, who had recently bought an old house and who let off rooms and flats.

They had a bed-sitting-room free on the ground floor, and this was cheap because, though it included a gas-ring, an electric toaster, and a basin with hot and cold taps hidden in a cupboard, it was far from being a self-contained flat.

It is not only foreign currency that runs short, and the cheapness appealed. With the disadvantages explained to me, I accepted it over the telephone and, on arrival, paid a week's rent in advance.

The disadvantages explained were that I had to enter my room from the front hall of the grand central flat on the ground floor, which was let on a long lease to an actor-manager and his wife; and that the bathroom opening off my bed-sitting-room, with a second door onto a passage and a narrow little stair, belonged fifty per cent to the young doctor who had two rooms above me. I had a half-share in the kitchen adjoining his flat, any time I might care to take up the option on a give-and-take basis.

My welcome, the house itself, and the street both reassured and charmed me.

First I was shown my room. It was large, comfortable, ingeniously arranged, and contained a mixture of irrelevant pretty things which had settled down together: Sheraton settee and elbow chairs with the paint kicked off their legs just near the ground, a Chinese chest of drawers in dull red gilt wood carved deeply with birds and animals, a bed-head painted by Bavarian peasants in 1806 with flowers and the Good Shepherd and a few

cheerful goats among the smiling sheep, rococo cherubs golden on the wall, beadwork roses on a Victorian footstool, and so on.

Then my landlord and landlady, Charles and Veronica Ralston, took me up for cocktails in their maisonnette to meet the other tenants. She was engaging, ran an efficient charwoman service for the whole house, looked after their pets—monkey, parrot, and cockatoo—and did her own cooking.

He was an architect. Because the street had been rebuilt in patches, between and during Charles II's reign and the Regency, and because the house itself had a rather distinguished central main part with lovely plaster decorations, but had incorporated smaller and shoddier next-door houses into a rambling whole, he was tracing the history of house and street in his spare time. The two Ralstons were agreeably in love.

The cocktail party was a success. I liked the other tenants, and guessed them to be friendly but not intrusive. I particularly liked my immediate neighbours: Roddy Drex, the doctor; and Mr. and Mrs. Julius Frame, craggily handsome actor-manager and smart American wife—besides a large Dalmatian dog, amiable and smiling, still active and mildly playful though growing broad across the back, and of the name of Diocletian.

We all began talking of the weather, a pleasant subject as it was hot and sunny, though some thought too much heat was on the way ; but we soon got on to livelier subjects, and laughed a good deal.

It ended with my supping on scrambled eggs and pâté de foie gras with the Frames, and striking up a great sympathy with Diocletian.

I went happily to my divan bed with the painted head-board, and was soon asleep.

I woke—or dreamt that I woke—in the middle of the night, those early small hours when resistance is low, to feel a horrible unnatural cold. I felt as though I'd been carried five years by a glacier with five more years—I did not know much about glaciers —fifty more years to go before being delivered, stiff as a board, to strangers on holiday in Switzerland.

I tried to move. I could not move. I had no possible command of movement.

I thought: I must snap out of this. It did seem as though I achieved some kind of mental effort.

I woke up, or came to.

The room was ridiculous and charming when I could turn on the light. I called the thing a nightmare, took a sleeping-draught, and slept well till morning. The weather was now sultry.

The second night, this experience was repeated, but—or at least it seemed so—for a much longer time. The voice that said, "You must snap out of this," seemed fainter and more remote; the effort to snap out of it seemed enormous. Yet I did come to, and found the weather and my room friendly. I took a sleeping-draught, and slept.

In the morning I agreed with myself about feeling really scared. I told myself that, having had one bad dream—the first since childhood—that great oaf, the subconscious, had insisted on repeating it. I told myself that I could do little more cruel than to rumour haunting, in a young couple's business venture with a charming house. I told myself that I could stay with some friends and pretend it had been an SOS, and later feel around to find out whether they'd had further trouble with that pretty room, in case I ought to tell.

There was a run of in-laws, expected or unexpected, in everyone's spare room. There was such panting heat in the streets that I could not quite believe in that fearsome cold. However, I lit the gas-fire and piled covers on the bed and took a great deal of sleeping-draught that night. I thought myself secure.

Later that night or very early the next morning, cold and immobile and sightless, I knew that other people came into the room. I knew that they looked at me, and rejected me, and went away.

Perhaps it is easier to explain my fear of the growing bad dream and the glacial cold and the increasing remoteness . . . distance . . . effort . . . than it is to explain the reassurance of heat, friendliness, and daylight.

I was scared enough to ring up a great dabbler in the occult, a specialist on the orient, and ask him to exorcize the room. "The cold, the cold," I insisted, fanning myself against the heat.

He could not come that day, but promised to be there next morning. I did not need to tell my host and hostess; it could be a surreptitious good turn. I am not, and never have been psychic, but I believe that it was a good turn indeed.

The morrow's promise revived me, and another nice thing happened. The actor-manager and his wife were going away for the night where they couldn't take Diocletian, and had lent their flat to a couple from Sussex who loathed dogs—would I take the dear fellow?

Would I *not*?

This delightful dog—they are considered psychic animals—entered my bed-sitting-room with the greatest content. Not only would I have his company, but the dear clever psychic fellow had found the room congenial. We bedded down close together

on the best of terms. The cold was so intense and so hideous that it almost drowned all other impressions—yet it seemed that someone—myself ?—wondered what it could be; and, believing that people who die in the snow feel a warmth and peace from which only a sense of duty to St. Bernard dogs can rouse them, was aghast at the consuming, paralysing anguish.

Frozen, rigid, horrified, and blind, I knew that again there were people in the room. But this time they were not rejecting me, or not in the same way. Quite casually, they were going to take me away. Some advising voice was so infinitely far away that it could only reach me without force or words; and the faint sound of a dog first barking, then howling, seemed as distant as pre-history or the North star.

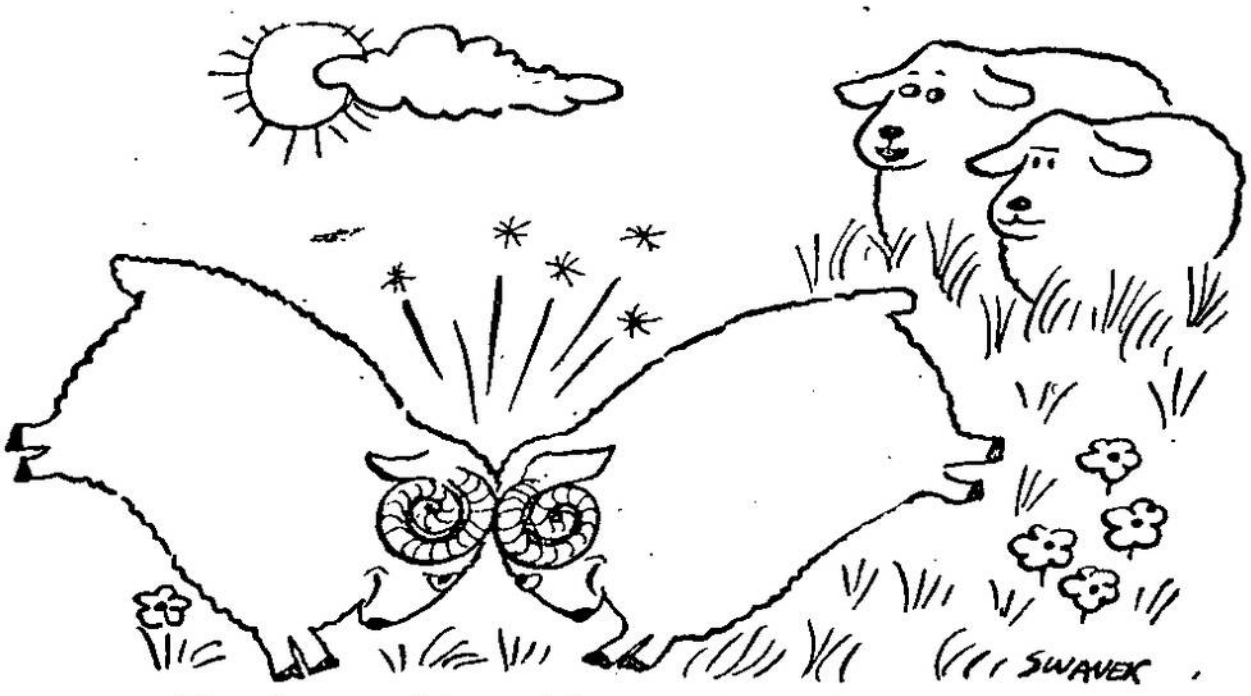
That bold anger of barking, the prolonged and frantic howls that followed brought the doctor to my room just as they touched me. Mr. and Mrs. Ralston arrived soon after. I am told that the two dog-haters rapped stern protest on the wall.

For a moment the doctor thought I had no pulse; then I was sitting up, blinking in the artificial light.

Next day I bought Diocletian a welcome present of liver for his dinner, and a ball and a rubber ring and a plush tiger which amused him greatly and filled his heart with pride.

But that night, the Ralstons took him with me and the doctor for refreshment and cherishing in their nice warm maisonnette, and over coffee and brandy and sandwiches, the architect told me what he had learnt the afternoon before.

My furnished apartment stood on the site of an ancient morgue.



They've no idea of husbanding their strength

JUPITER IN PARIS

One man and two women—
he knew who would have the man

BY JOHN INGLIS HALL

LEWIS unfolded the letter again and spread it out on the bar counter in front of him, with the top of the sheet under his glass.

It had spent the morning in his pocket in rather unpromising company—with a note from an elderly aunt whose writing was so difficult to read that he never tried, the business card of a man named William Prendergast—a left-over card that he kept to hand out, according to his custom, to some casual one-day acquaintance as his own—and a receipted bill for a shampoo and trim for his French poodle.

Generally, there was more stuff in his pocket, but he had had one of his sudden clean-outs the week before and thrown away a lot of dead bills and correspondence. This, however, was a fair start to a new collection. The only old piece was Prendergast. He liked the fellow's name, and so the day when he would, for an hour and to some stranger, be William Prendergast was always put off.

Instead, of recent weeks, he had been in turn George Hackitt, Stamford Crossmann, Bernard Ockly, and Frames Satterthwaite. He always felt that this way of disposing of redundant business cards helped him to be himself.

Lewis Duncton was, in fact, an odd fish, not by nature perhaps so much as by application. He had a certain talent for being privately droll, which he exercised almost entirely for his own pleasure. New women rather liked it for the time that they remained new.

Later, when the moment of enchantment passed, they hated it. What had formerly attracted them to him eventually severed them from him, which, in its way, was satisfactory.

The letter, which he had heard as it landed with a soft tap and rustle on the hall mat of his apartment that morning, was from one of the disenchanted. He remembered her writing. It was bold, curled, beautifully shaped, elaborate, yet completely orderly. She had even given the old extra flourish to the L of his

Christian name, which had been a private epistolary love-sign between them for over a year.

As he opened it, thinking, Good lord—Martá, he found himself recalling, for remote, sensual reasons, that she had licked the flap of the envelope. He slit it open carefully with a knife and smelt it. She had been a woman with a highly personal physical scent, part natural, part acquired. It was on the letter, having lasted all the way to Paris from Vancouver, if the stamp and the postmark were to be believed. He began to read.

Lewis . . . There had never been any "darling" between them. Plain names had been enough, accompanied by those small, personal embroideries of individual letters of the alphabet which were infinitely secret and expressive. They had fought shy of open expressions of love.

We have an island with a white, sandy beach running down to the sea, called Rummers Island, and have patched up a ruined cabin we found there, to live in. Provisions come by boat from Vancouver once a week with the mail . . .

We? Who the devil are we, Lewis thought, taken unawares by a twinge of jealousy, then remembered that, being Martá, she was unlikely ever to explain. She had not explained, even when she had packed up and left him before that which had been perfect between them had died, though they both knew its intensity was fading, or would soon fade. He read on.

We have an old boat of our own for fair weather—it's unsafe in any sea—and we fish from it. Salmon run up the river in autumn and the woods are full of game. Imagine me shooting! I'm not good, but we manage well enough. Last week I panned a little gold in a creek—only a few small specks—but when I held it in the palm of my hand, I thought suddenly, I must write to Lewis.

That was all—save for the signature, with his own particular flourished M for Martá. A maddening letter, quite pointless. The thing was over. He read it again, and smiled wryly. At least there was an address. Martá, of course, was perfectly capable of writing such a letter and not giving one. It was on the back of the blue airmail envelope with its striped edge: *Rummers Island, Vancouver, B.C.*

So there was, inherent in her letter, an invitation to reply. In that case, should he deliberately not reply? To remain silent would be a touch of malice that Martá would be quick to appreciate. Lewis folded the letter again and put it back in his pocket with his aunt, William Prendergast, and the poodle, and began to recall incidents in the elaborate game which, two years ago, had been played out between himself and Martá Király.

Greek had met Greek, certainly, and in one sense only had there been no tug of war.

They had met one evening in Cantoni's bar, off the rue Magellan, beside the Champs-Elysées. That was why, on this day, when he had received her letter, he found himself, almost involuntarily, lunching there.

Georges Cantoni came over from the far end of the bar, bringing with him a plate of salted almonds. The place was for some reason rather empty that morning. For a few minutes, they discussed food, then when Georges left him to give the orders to his wife in the tiny kitchen at the back of the bar, Lewis's attention returned to Martá.

No, he decided, she would not have written to him without purpose, in a moment of nostalgia. He knew her well enough for that. The more he thought of it, the more certain he felt that the note was an oblique and curious love-letter, far removed perhaps from any possibility of consequence, but none the less the expression of a sentiment that remained alive in her, and that for some reason she had allowed to emerge.

The letter itself was written in exactly the same manner as she had always affected. Two years had changed nothing. So when Georges called him to his table, Lewis took out from his briefcase the writing-pad and envelopes that he had brought with him from his office, and began, as he ate his cream-of-sorrel soup, to consider what he should say to her in reply. It was an original and an amusing exercise; the idea soon came to him and he began to write.

Martá (he began, with a flourish of the M, according to their old habit) *Georges Cantoni is about to bring me a fillet steak, very underdone, some haricots verts fins with butter from the Charente, and half a litre of claret; while you, maybe, are panning grains of gold in a creek on Rummers Island off the coast of British Columbia. Or rather, not you, but "we."*

I am telling myself that there are three of you, for delicate private reasons. Were there only two, that would mean, surely, you and one man. Therefore, I plump for three, for my peace of mind. But if you were two women and one man, I know who would have the man, so the thing would not last. Were you two men and one woman, the time would be short between the arrival and the duel to the death—on that white, sandy beach, with you looking on from the window of your ruined cabin, the boat drawn up in front of it, ready for you to take a fishing-trip with the victor. In fact, there would even now be only two of you, and this I could not tolerate.

Therefore, I prefer to believe that some little time ago, you lay casually with some giant or god in Vancouver or New York and conceived twin boys whom I have christened Romulus and Remus, and that, father having been recalled unexpectedly to the Country of the Trolls or to Olympus, you are rearing your offspring close to nature on Rummers Island, in order to fit them from infancy for the conditions that will prevail after the next war. I hope that I may be spared to meet them.

My only query is: should they be handling firearms that may well be obsolete before they come of age? You have only to cable me, and I shall have bows and arrows forwarded to you from New York by Kate MacDona, whom I saw quite a lot of in Paris this spring . . .

He signed the letter, continuing the bottom stroke of the L the whole length of his name, as custom decreed, then picked up his knife and fork. Georges Cantoni's wife had the most exquisite eye for good meat, and furthermore, her knives were the sharpest in all Paris, so that not only were her steaks tender, but there was about them also an illusion of almost impossible tenderness.

Lewis cut his steak. It was perfect. The juice ran out. It was tender, too, between the teeth, delicious, enhanced by a Béarnaise sauce. Georges looked on, smiling, as he savoured it.

Putting down his knife after he had swallowed the first mouthful, Lewis said, " Tell Lilliane that she is the master cook of Paris."

" I married her for that very reason," said Georges. " Women are much the same, except in the kitchen, n'est-ce pas, Monsieur Lewis? "

Lewis did not reply. He was, at this particular moment, by no means sure.

That evening, for some reason, Lewis decided to make a complete break with the past as represented by the contents of his pocket. He tore up the letter from his aunt and the bill for clipping his poodle, and disposed of the Prendergast card in his usual manner on the way home. Evidently, Martá Király was to occupy his pocket all by herself.

Yet he felt sure that, in spite of having remembered him and written him an affectionate letter after their fashion, Martá was having an affair with a man on an island off the coast of British Columbia. There was no doubt about it, because she had not been explicit. Now that he had established the affair in terms of Romulus and Remus, however, it would be interesting to see how her wit would meet the situation.

For reasons which he did not bother to analyse, he went often

to Cantoni's bar in the weeks during which he waited, with increasing impatience, for her reply to his letter. The place recalled her to his mind: her ridiculous hats, her laughter and superb physique, her hand gestures and scent. He was vain enough to think that she would not be able to resist replying to his letter.

Soon, however, Lewis found himself cut off from his current intrigues; he severed himself from them, in fact, by sheer neglect. It was something which he had never done before, and he was at a loss to understand the symptoms, or else refused to admit that there were any.

Nevertheless, at the end of a month of silence, he weakened horribly and sent Martá a cable: WHAT OF ROMULUS AND REMUS? AM AWAITING NEWS OF THEM. LEWIS.

Another week passed before he decided to have the cable investigated, and discovered that delivery had been impossible as the party had left Rummers Island . . .

Four days later, the morning after he had made inquiries about an air passage to Vancouver, he found Martá sitting at her original seat at Cantoni's, waiting for him to come in to lunch.

She stood up, laughing, as he entered, and examined him with amused blue eyes. " Martá! " he almost shouted.

He saw that her hat was absurd, her physique unimpaired, her attraction still irresistible—the whole illusion.

" Why, it's Jupiter himself," she said, holding out her hands to him, " the King of the Trolls. The father of Romulus and Remus. Dad in person."

" Who were they? " he cried. " The twins, I mean? Who were they? "

He was not so far gone that he really believed in his own fiction, but sufficiently far gone to use it naturally in conversation.

" I have sisters," she said. " We went on vacation together. One day, in spite of everything, I found myself writing you a letter. But, Lewis—I never thought you'd bother to reply! "

★ ★ ★

SCOTCHED

A young man at a party felt that he was getting on very well with the blonde he had met for the first time.

" When this is over what about coming to my flat for a whisky and sofa? " he asked her.

" Don't care for a whisky and sofa," she replied, " but I don't mind coming for a gin and platonic."

LEWIS BARTON, *Considered Trifles*

We that are true lovers run into strange capers

As You Like It

For glances beget ogles, ogles sighs,
Sighs wishes, wishes words, and words a letter
And then, God knows what mischief may arise,
When love links two young people in one fetter.

LORD BYRON, *Beppo*

This Was How It Was

Suddenly she said: " Have you ever swam naked? "

The wood was very quiet and for a minute he did not answer . . . " I—I don't think so."

This excitement was in her, and she said something she didn't mean to say. " I would if you would. I dare you to."

Harry slicked back the dark wet bangs of his hair. " O.K."

They both took off their bathing-suits. Harry had his back to her. He stumbled and his ears were red. Then they turned toward each other. Maybe it was half an hour they stood there —maybe not more than a minute.

Harry pulled a leaf from a tree and tore it to pieces. " We better get dressed."

All through the picnic dinner neither of them spoke. They spread the dinner on the ground. Harry divided everything in half. There was the hot, sleepy feeling of a summer afternoon . . .

She threw a pine cone in the water. " Maybe we better start back if we want to be home before dark."

" No," he said. " Let's lie down. Just for a minute."

He brought handfuls of pine needles and leaves and grey moss. She sucked her knee and watched him. Her fists were tight and it was like she was tense all over.

" Now we can sleep and be fresh for the trip home."

They lay on the soft bed and looked up at the dark-green pine clumps against the sky. A bird sang a sad, clear song she had never heard before. One high note like an oboe—and then it sank down five tones and called again. The song was sad as a question without words.

" I love that bird," Harry said. " I think it's a vireo . . ."

They both turned at the same time. They were close against each other. She felt him trembling and her fists were tight enough to crack. " Oh, God," he kept saying over and over. It was like her head had broke off from her body and thrown away. And her eyes looked straight into the blinding sun while she counted something in her mind. And then this was the way.

This was how it was.

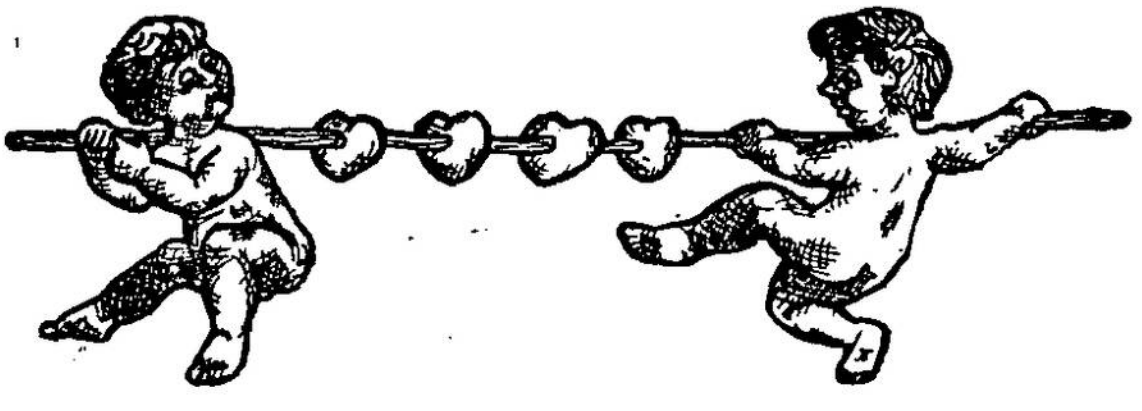
CARSON MCCULLERS, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*

The Thieves

Lovers in the act dispense
With such meum-tuum sense
As might warningly reveal
What they must not pick or steal,
And their nostrum is to say:
" I and you are both away."
After when they disentwine
You from me and yours from mine,
Neither can be certain who
Was that I whose mine was you.
To the act again they go
More completely not to know.

Theft is theft and raid is raid
Though reciprocally made.
Lovers, the conclusion is
Doubled sighs and jealousies
In a single heart that grieves
For lost honour among thieves.

ROBERT GRAVES



Awakening

" What is it, darling love? " . . .

" I am so beautifully happy."

He took her into his arms, and then sighed, so that she, in her turn, asked: " What is it? "

" I am so beautifully *un*happy. There's the difference."

" Why, darling—*why* are you? "

He pulled her lemon shirt away from her neck to kiss it.

" I don't want to tell you now." His hand slid round to the back of her neck. " I *must* kiss you. You *must* kiss me. Now."

His breath was like smoke on her face—his eyes near, nearer still—grey, with black pools—then all black . . . She kissed him passionately because he had said that he was unhappy; then because she loved him and he was kissing her, and then there ceased to be any reason. Her head lay hard against the palm of his hand; his other hand stroking her skin with quick, nervous, possessive movements, until it enclosed her breast—she gave a little fainting cry of astonished ecstasy as her heart leapt under his hand, and her mouth had suddenly a furious sweetness. At the height, on the brink of this torrent, he stopped and said roughly: " Now you see why I'm ' beautifully ' unhappy. I want you . . . You're beginning to understand what that means, now, aren't you? Wait a few minutes more."

There was no chance to reply: she heard her shirt tearing a little, but the sound seemed to come from a distance: it was as though they were galloping—their bodies racing one another; the only near things were his mouth and his requiring hands.

When, at last, he released her, she was aware of nothing but the loss of him—that the race was not over, but stopped, and a sense of intolerable anguish that was almost anger assailed her at his abandonment. Bruised and breathless, she saw him staring down at her—searchingly—and then with a little, hard, triumphant smile at what he saw: her eyes dark, and filled with tears of desire; her mouth printed the shape that he had left it. She felt his fingers tighten on her bare shoulder as he bent over her and whispered: " You understand now, don't you? You want *me* now, don't you? "

ELIZABETH JANE HOWARD, *The Long View*

Envoi

Green grow the rashes, O!
Green grow the rashes, O!
The sweetest hours that e'er I spend,
Are spent amang the lasses, O!

ROBERT BURNS

SEARCH FOR TOMORROW

When the light begins to fail -
the bush becomes a thing of evil

BY EDWARD LINDALL

BARDEN dropped the freshly buckled pack on the wall bunk and turned to look at Jane Easther. She was standing in the doorway of his one-roomed shack, a slim, rounded outline against the mellow afternoon sunshine. The back lighting hid her face, but he could tell by the tight quality in her voice that she was scared.

He went towards her and then he could see her face was scared, too, the dark eyes too big, a blood-drained whiteness in her cheeks. " Now, don't worry," Barden said quietly. " It's two hours yet to sundown."

" I know," she said. " But he's late." She moved into the room with short, almost hesitant steps. " He's never been late like this before."

" Boys are always up to something," Barden said. " Even good kids like Billy." He looked out of the window, past the homestead, and over the fallow paddocks to the bush that surrounded the little farm. A rolling monotony of undergrowth and stunted mallee trees. He could see the opening of the school track to Aurora and half expected Billy to come riding out as he watched. " Probably he's playing football," he added.

" I'm being silly, I know," Jane Easther said, and gave a forced little laugh. Slightly off-key, slightly unsteady. " But I've got no one else to worry about . . . only Billy."

She sent her eyes round the little room, bare now that Barden had packed his scant personal belongings. Her full-lipped mouth drooped a little, settling a look of weariness on her lovely face. " There's the farm, too," she said. " That's another worry."

Barden had seen the silent reproach in her eyes as she had looked round the room, and now he started rolling a cigarette so he wouldn't have to meet her gaze. " You know I have to go," he said evenly. " I told you when I came I could only stay for the winter."

" Of course," she said, with a touch of irony. " Summer is rambling-time. There's all Australia waiting for you." She paused. " I thought you might just stay for spring sowing. A few more weeks."

" You'll easily get another hand," Barden said. " Season workers will be around soon." He pushed the stray tobacco ends into the cigarette with a match, his big, square-fingered hands working very deliberately. There was a set look about his lean face and in his blue eyes. His wide, humorous mouth was moulded in a new stubbornness. " I've got an appointment with a pack-horse and a valley where the kangaroos are so tame they'll eat from your hand. I'm a wanderer . . . I belong out of doors."

" Sometimes I envy you," Jane Easther said. She walked slowly towards the door. " Sometimes I'm sorry for you."

Barden flushed a dull red through the deep tan of his face. " Billy ought to be along soon now," he grunted. " I'll saddle up and go down the track to meet him."

" He'd like that," Jane said quietly. She turned in the doorway. " He's going to miss you . . . . terribly."

" He knows how I feel about things," Barden said gruffly. " About the bushland and the mountains."

" Yes," she said. " He'd understand. His father would have, too." Suddenly her voice held that undertone of fear that Barden had noticed at first. Her face was tight again, drained of colour. " His father loved the bush, too. The way you do. And he's buried in it. Out there, under the mallee trees. He'd been lost four weeks when they found him . . ."

Barden had heard the story of that nightmare search from the townspeople of Aurora, six months before, when he'd been looking for a winter job to keep him snug until he could sleep under the stars again. This was the first time she had spoken of it.

" I'm sorry," he said awkwardly. " I know—I know how you must feel."

" It was four years ago," she said simply. " I've never got over my fear of the bush."

" It can get you that way," Barden agreed softly. " You love it or you hate it."

" I don't hate it," she said. " It just scares me. It's scaring me now."

" Look," he said, " it's only three miles to Aurora. Billy knows every tree and every lizard on the track."

Her lips twitched him a little smile of thanks, but it was only on the surface. " I can't think straight. He's such a little boy."

" A wise little boy," Barden said. " Bush-wise." He put a

hand on her shoulder, gently, and turned her to face the doorway. " Phone the school while I'm saddling. Then we can both stop worrying."

He stood in the doorway, watching her cross the open space between his shack and the homestead where she lived alone with Billy. The good red earth was thick with grass from the winter rains. The homestead and its outhouses threw long shadows, and their western walls were golden with the late-afternoon sun. The fallow paddocks and the scrub were touched with gold, too. The air sparkled.

But these things were lost on Barden as he watched the tall, long-limbed woman walk swiftly towards the house. In that moment there was something indefinable about her that caught his breath. It underlined what he had known for weeks past—that he had to leave in the morning or he would never go. If he stayed for the spring sowing he would be planting his own roots too. It would be so easy with a woman like her, he thought. And a boy like Billy. A thin, wiry colt of a boy with an eager face and a thatch of yellow hair. A shy little boy who gave friendship guardedly—and Barden knew he'd received it to the point of hero-worship.

He shook his head sharply, telling himself again he wasn't the settling kind. He was a free man, with an itch in feet and eyes, aching for the view from the next hill. He threw his cigarette down, almost in anger, and marched round to the stables.

Jane Easther ran from the house as he rode across the yard, and her chalk-white face shouted that everything had gone wrong. " He hasn't been to school," she called, her voice thin and high. " He hasn't been there all day."

Barden leapt from the saddle and gripped her shoulders hard. " Hold it. Don't let go." He rapped the words out because he needed brusqueness to bludgeon the fear that rose in his own throat.

" Do something," she commanded fiercely. " We have to do something. Quickly."

" Take it easy," Barden said tightly. " Playing hookey isn't serious."

Her dark eyes searched his face, hopefully at first. Then she bit her lip. " You don't believe that, do you? "

Barden was conscious of the softness of her body under his hands, the nearness of her lips. He looked away, unable to meet her troubled gaze, and an image of Billy danced in his mind. The thin, loose-jointed figure of a little boy with his mother's dark eyes. He admitted to himself then, for the first time, how he'd come to love the boy.

He turned quickly and climbed into the saddle. "I'll go find him," he said harshly. "If something's happened, he won't have strayed far from the track."

"Wait." She laid a hand on his stirrup. "I'm coming, too."

"No," Barden said. "Phone the police. See if he's in Aurora. Maybe at someone's house . . . one of his school pals."

He dug in his heels and the big roan leapt forward. The bush closed in as he threaded the narrow school track and he reined back to a trot. His eyes probed ceaselessly, and every hundred yards or so he stopped to call out, ringing his voice against the hard palate like a drill sergeant, then projecting it in a long-drawn *cooee-e-ee*.

The clop of hoofs, the creak of saddle leather, and his raised voice were the only sounds.

The light began to fail, and gradually the bush changed character in his mind and became a thing of evil.

By darkness his fears were torture and he was on the outskirts of the town. He wanted badly to go in and check with Sergeant Mitchell of the police, but Jane was doing that by phone and it would be wasting time. He forced himself to drag the roan round. He walked the horse the long, desolate way back, calling out at intervals, fighting the torturing fear by telling himself that Billy would be home, contrite in that way that stopped all anger, eating vast hunks of pie, and stammering in his eagerness to tell of his adventures.

But when he came out on the fallow, the homestead light was cold and lonely; not warm and bright the way it would have been with Billy in the room. He went up the verandah steps to where Jane stood silently in a spilt rectangle of light.

"He's not in the town," she said bleakly. "The police tried every home."

He wrapped a long, muscular arm round her shoulders and all the strength seemed to leave her body. He felt her weight against him, smelt the clean sweetness of her hair, but he was too eaten up with fear for Billy to be stirred. He led her inside to a chair, got her a cigarette from a silver box, and lit it.

"We'll call the other farms," he said tersely. "He might be there somewhere."

"They'd have rung us."

"People forget sometimes."

"The police are taking out torch parties," she said, "to beat both sides of the track."

Barden nodded sombrely. "All the same, I'll ring the farms."

But the men for miles around had left to join the search. They

had to face the horrifying truth: Billy was lost. Lost in that vast wilderness that had killed his father and countless men besides.

Barden felt panic spiralling in him and needed all his strength to hold it down. He had to be calm now, calmer and stronger than he had ever been before, because Jane Easther needed help. Not physical help, there were searchers enough for that, but qualities of steadfastness and reasoned hope. Things that would comfort her during the long agony of waiting.

He moved slowly across the room and stood beside her chair, not speaking. The clean night air had become as stifling as a fog. A hateful silence clamoured in the room.

"I can't understand it," Jane Easther said, shaking her head in obstinate disbelief. "He *knew* he mustn't leave the track."

"Perhaps he saw a bird," Barden said. "Or some animal. Went after it and couldn't get back."

"Maybe Prince bolted." She grasped his hand. "Maybe he's hurt—lying out there hurt."

"Not Prince," Barden said, denying the suggestion against his common sense. "Prince wouldn't bolt. And Billy's too good a horseman to be thrown."

She looked up at him, her face a mask. Only her eyes betrayed the torture she was going through. Then suddenly she dropped her head and great sobs shuddered through her body. "Billy . . . oh Billy."

The desolation in her voice stung Barden's eyes to tears. He dropped on one knee and drew her head against his chest. All the world was in the room with him then, all of it that he wanted, and he was powerless. A great bitterness seared Barden as he thought how he had told the boy tall stories of the bush . . . stories of his wanderings . . . of beauty hidden in the trees and mountains . . . of magic nights with friendly stars. And now the boy would know that it was all a lie. The bush was malignant, treacherous. A thing to fear and hate.

Conscience stabbed him and twisted in the wound. For it was only yesterday they'd gone roaming together in their minds. Billy had helped him pack, and they had talked. How they had talked! The whole pattern of his summer's wanderings had been explored, each detail tested—the trapping, the washing for gold, the shooting of food, and then the grilling of it above red-tongued mallee fires.

And he'd taken the boy outside and shown him the rocky peak marking the quiet valley where he'd planned to spend his first week. The raptness of the boy's face, the excitement in his eyes stared back now. Stared so vividly that they seemed to hold a

message, like some madly flickering heliograph. Barden felt his pulses quicken.

At first he didn't understand. There was just this tingling in his body, this rustling in his mind, the way it was sometimes before a thunderstorm. Everything hushed and on tiptoe, waiting for the storm to break. Then it broke, sudden as forked lightning. But instead of the tension easing, it increased. An intolerable emptiness sickened his stomach and his mouth dried up. "Jane," he said unevenly, "Jane, I think I know where he is."

"Where?" She broke away from him, digging her fingers hard into his arm; her voice was fierce with urgency. "Where is he?"

"It's only a hunch," he warned. "It might be wrong."

"Where?" she said again. She leapt up and whirled to look down at him as he knelt. "*Where?*"

"I told him about a valley where I was going tomorrow." He scrambled to his feet and waved towards the mountains, ten miles away through the darkness. "I guess I laid it on thick—with kangaroos and wombats and kookaburras."

"That's it," she said tensely.

"Don't build on it too much," Barden warned again. "It's only a hunch. The way he looked at me, the questions . . ."

"It's more than a hunch," she said. "You don't know how upset he's been. He'd do anything to be with you."

Barden again felt the stab of self-accusation. "I'll get the horses," he said. "By dawn we should be somewhere near the valley. We'll check direction then and ride in."

As his hands worked swiftly on the horses, he weighed the chances, tracking them in his mind. The valley was not hard to find, he thought. Its sentinel peak towered above the plain. Lonely and unmistakable. Billy would make it all right, build himself a camp-fire, and settle down to wait. That much was good, and thinking about it made him feel better.

But while he was saddling the second horse a doubt started and the old fear came back. Night could be a time of terror for a small boy, hunched lonely at a camp-fire, hearing the whisper and moan of trees, the squeak and chitter of roving animals. Shy and harmless as they were, he knew they could be bears and tigers to a small, imaginative boy.

What if Billy panicked and fled into the bush, deeper and deeper, until thirst crazed him and his strength ran out? Barden brought himself up sharply then, knowing he had to have faith in the boy, that he had to act big and confident for Jane's sake.

She was waiting on the lighted verandah as he trotted up to the house. She had changed into jeans and a coloured shirt. A

man's wide-brimmed hat covered her dark hair, ready for the next day's sun. Her shoulders were squared and her chin high, but there was about her an air of forced defiance that was somehow pathetic.

"Better phone the police," Barden said. "Tell Sergeant Mitchell what we're doing."

"I've done that," she said tersely. "The search-parties are going out along the track. We'll contact them tomorrow." Her booted foot touched a haversack and two canteens. "I've packed food and water, too."

"Good," Barden grunted. "Let's go."

A slice of moon lounged in a cloudless sky and they crossed the fallow paddocks at a trot. But in the bush the moonlight was so filtered there were only gradations of black through dark grey.

Barden halted for a while to let his eyes adjust themselves, then started forward at a cautious walk.

"Slack your reins," he told Jane. "They'll pick their own way better than we can guide."

"If we separate," she said, "keep on for the valley. Don't look for me."

"We won't split."

"But if we do," she insisted, "promise you'll keep on."

Barden thought about that for a moment. "All right," he said, at last, "I'll keep on."

That was the end of talking, except for an occasional thrown word. They leaned far forward, almost flat on the horses' necks, to avoid being scraped off by low branches. Bushes whipped back to slash at them and cramp burnt in their legs. But they kept on, only stopping for an instant to straighten up when the cramp became too agonizing, or Barden needed to fix direction by a sight on the crescent moon.

In those bottomless hours, Barden would have given anything for the gift of soothing words. He knew the agony she was going through and there was nothing he could do to comfort her. There was no comfort for him, either. His mind churned endlessly, and every thought, every facet of a thought blamed him so harshly that he welcomed the pain of the lashing bushes, the burning of his cramp-knotted legs.

And when the first subtle change came in the night, when trees and bushes began to show themselves, he was desperately afraid.

In a few more hours they would penetrate the valley. He did not know what would happen to Jane Easther, or to him, if Billy was not there.

He threw a quick look at the slender woman riding at his side. In the greyness, her face was strained and white, as it had been when they had started; only now there was a great red scratch across it and her hair was tangled, her clothes torn.

" You ought to hate me," he said bitterly, " for what I've done. You ought to hate the sight of me."

She turned her head and something glowed for an instant behind the pain in her dark eyes. " Hate you? " she said wonderingly. " Why? "

Bitterness was a shadow on Barden's face. " This would never have happened but for me," he said harshly. " I kept telling Billy about the bush . . . about the wonderful places . . . about this valley." He paused a moment. " I never stopped once to tell him how good it was to have a home—somewhere to work, to eat, and sleep. Somewhere to *live*."

" I listened, too," she said gently, so gently that the words scarcely carried over the noise of movement. " I didn't stop you."

Barden kept his eyes straight ahead, and now weak sunlight slanted through the trees. He saw colour shining from a wild-flower and he hadn't thought to see any colour that day.

" You mustn't blame yourself," she said. " I wanted you to tell him. I couldn't because I feared the bush until you came. But when you talked, I felt different . . . the way I used to feel."

" I made myself out a hero," he said soberly, " when all the time I was only a hobo."

" I wouldn't have my boy grow up not loving the quiet places," she said. " Not knowing there were things beyond the hills, outside the farm."

" Even beyond the hills you need a home," Barden said. He cleared his throat, selfconsciously, because the day was too young for dust. " A boy needs a home," he added lamely. " Somewhere to tie up."

The mountains reared up out of the bush before them, suddenly, sharp-etched against a washed blue sky. Barden climbed a tree and found the peak marking the valley entrance, about a mile away. They urged the horses towards it, climbing the slope in a long diagonal.

The ground became rocky and the bush thinned. Clumps of cactus and stiff yacca appeared. The sun lay across their backs and warmed them, but they didn't notice it. There was too much in their minds. Then they stood at the head of the valley, looking down into its lush beauty with hard, searching eyes.

" You're sure he'll be here? " Jane said, almost breathing the words they were so soft. " You're sure? "

" No," Barden said slowly. " I'm not sure."

" Of course," she said wearily. Her shoulders drooped. " I've been praying so hard I forgot."

They rode down into the serene valley, and kangaroos and wallabies stood erect, forelegs tucked into their chests, to watch them pass. Kookaburras threw their mad laughing songs down from tall gums. And then they reached the creek and in its soft grass bank Barden found fresh hoofmarks. The small, neat marks of a pony.

Excitement spurred them on.

Then Barden reined in. Sharply. " Look! " he yelled stridently. " Smoke! "

His shout triggered all the pent-up tension that was in Jane. While it still echoed in the air, she was away, swinging her horse between the trees like a polo pony. A hundred yards ahead, wood smoke curled into the morning air. Pale blue, thin; yet substantial with promise. Barden lifted his hands to chase after her, then checked the movement, forcing himself to follow quietly, knowing this was her moment.

Then he saw a small figure running through the trees, shafts of light glinting on a yellow thatch of hair. He saw Jane leap from her stiff-legged, sliding horse, go down on her knees as her arms folded round the boy. They were as motionless as a group of statuary. And Barden knew they were both crying.

For a moment he felt like a stranger. But only for a moment, for they turned and he saw that the tear-wet happiness in their faces was for him, too.

" I knew you'd come," Billy said, fighting his trembling lips. " I knew you'd come."

Barden dismounted slowly, giving himself time to compose his face the way Billy would expect. Then he wrapped his arms round them both and it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

" You're quite a bushman," he said with an assumed casualness. " Picked a good camp-site, got your fire going . . ."

As he knelt there, with the warm softness of them in his arms, a sense of completeness came to him. The valley took on a new beauty. Richer. More lush. And he knew that he could never enjoy it alone again.

He balanced his voice deep in his throat for a while, making sure it would come out as he wanted it to. Then he said evenly, " Let's get some breakfast." He took his arms away and stood up. " Billy, you bring some water while I unpack the food."

Billy's eyes glistened. " Are we going camping? " His voice squeaked with incredulous joy. " All of us? "

"Not right now," Barden said gently. He smiled at the disappointment on the boy's face, reached out a big hand, and ruffled his hair. "There's the ploughing and sowing to do first. Maybe we'll all go camping when it's done."

A sudden nervousness gripped him and he looked away, down towards the little creek where Billy's pony grazed so unconcernedly. He could feel Jane's eyes on him and his face grew hot. Then a kookaburra gave its insane laugh, as though in mockery. He forced his head round and the nervousness disappeared.

A fierce, sweet joy surged through his body, for Jane was smiling at him, a deep smile that was soft on her lips and infinite in her eyes.

"Women get in the way camping," she said. "But if you *both* ask me, I'll come."

★ ★ ★

NOUGHTS AND CROSSES

Nothing makes a reader so cross as a question without an answer, so if you can't supply the 20 solutions to our noughtical cross-questions, turn to page 96 where the answers are lined up for you.

1. *What is thought to be the oldest cosmetic in history?*
2. *"Don't shoot till you see the whites of their eyes!" In what battle was this order given?*
3. *Who presented the Statue of Liberty to the people of the U.S.A.?*
4. *What were the names of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse?*
5. *"Fifty Grand" has a grand sound, but do you know how much money it is?*
6. *Clementine's father, you remember, was a "forty-niner," but can you say who these individuals were?*
7. *What was the date of the year following 1 B.C.?*
8. *Can you identify the following:*
   - *a. Willy-willy*
   - *b. Ouija*
   - *c. Calliope*
   - *d. Chuckwalla*
9. *Can you supply the missing partner and the author in each of the following:*
   - *a. Dr. Jekyll and ——*
   - *b. Sylvie and ——*
   - *c. Troilus and ——*

THE GOURMET AND THE GIRL

" She," said Mr. Wu
" is young lady of four tons "

BY JAMES NORMAN

GOD makes some men poets. Some He makes kings, others beggars. Edgar Trelawny He made a gourmet.

To his friends, Trelawny was a man who possessed everything. There was a tidy fortune, not so unwieldy as to annoy him, yet ample for his every need. He lived in an excellent Connecticut community, in a proconsular house surrounded by shaved lawns, a swimming-pool, an egg-shaped duck-pond, gardens, and a greenhouse where he raised plump edible snails on a regimen of strawberries and a bran mash flavoured with a blend of aromatic wines.

He was a slim, correct person, with a Vandyke beard and greying temples, as befits a distinguished bachelor. His reputation as a man of refinement was beyond criticism and his collection of Carlovingian ivories was noteworthy, but above all, he was looked up to as an arbiter of exquisite food and vintage wines.

Dining with Trelawny was a memorable event. His generalship at table, his tactical knowledge of food were amazing. He knew exactly which wine should be served with a partridge that has been fed on thyme and marjoram, how an aioli worthy of the name should be prepared, and which glace must be offered to convert a dinner into a brilliant victory.

When Trelawny ate, it was not simply a matter of consuming food. Whenever he confronted a well-set board, he deftly loosened whichever of the famous waistcoats he was wearing—perhaps a chartreuse-and-gold velveteen—then settled himself comfortably.

But before he touched crystal or silver, his alert eyes scanned the fare with careful absorption, noting shades of colour, nuances in the ripeness of an Aleppo olive, or the tone of a sauce crevette. His nostrils would begin to quiver delicately. Suddenly throwing all inhibitions aside, he would set to work on the viands, munching vigorously, savouring, chewing slowly, then rapidly, pausing reflectively. If, midway through this course, Trelawny's face

became flushed and perspired and he paused to pull out a foulard with which to mop his brow, there was a general sigh of relief. The menu had passed muster.

People at home and abroad considered it an honour to provide a menu for Trelawny. Each day his post was flooded with invitations and notices; long ago he had had to have his phone disconnected. Provisioners thought of him even before kings. Noted chefs and restaurateurs sent him their most carefully composed menus, for if Trelawny dined in a restaurant and perspired, the place was made.

In all his life, Trelawny had never touched such prosaic fare as a hamburger or a Waldorf salad. For him, even tinned food was anathema and grounds for breaking off the tenderest friendship. At home, unless he had something really exceptional to offer himself, Trelawny ate with monastic restraint, indulging in little more than a bowl of chilled Beirut yoghurt and sipping demi-tasses of thick Turkish coffee meticulously brewed by his Filipino houseboy, Mabuhay.

For years, this had been his life—tasting, travelling, cooking. His trim Vandyke, his colourful Edwardian-revival waistcoats—he had fifty—and his inquiring dark eyes were a familiar sight at exclusive dining-clubs, tucked-away restaurants, and fish stalls from Paris to Shanghai.

He was a restless hunter, pursuing the spoor of remarkable recipes and unusual fare. It delighted him to discover something different—like that famed Cochin delicacy, curried black ants baked in grape leaves with thin strips of pork—he could reproduce for his epicurean friends.

But one day there came the moment when Trelawny found himself facing a blank wall: he had seemingly eaten and served everything worth eating. At first, he refused to believe it. Frantically, he searched through his library, digging back into antiquity, regulping Trimalchio's Banquet with Petronius, prowling through the eight rare volumes of Apicius. But there was nothing to be found.

It was Mabuhay who first noticed the change in Trelawny. Mabuhay, a tiny man with hands as fragile as old leaves, and a brown face marked by a faint but impervious hauteur, had been with Trelawny for years. As sensitive to his master's humours as an alert barometer, Mabuhay saw the symptoms immediately.

The critical searching glance had faded from Trelawny's eyes. He wore the weary expression of a man who has reached the dead end of passion.

When he began to shut himself up, refusing invitations to dine, Mabuhay began to pray to his Samar gods.

Then one day there occurred the miracle Mabuhay had prayed for. A Chinese gentleman appeared at the gate, and Mabuhay happily brought his calling-card back to the study. Trelawny glanced at it indifferently:

MR. WU-SHIH
Chef in Cuisine of Large Animals
(Incl. Whales)

Trelawny shrugged. He had eaten whale in many ways. He was about to wave Mabuhay away, when he turned the card over and his eyes caught the italicized motto printed on the back: *What are sheep's trotters and insipid boiled calves' feet compared to baked elephant's paws ?*

He sat up with a start.

" Elephant's paws," he murmured. A new alertness, such as pleased Mabuhay, shone in the master's eyes.

Mr. Wu was shown in. He was a frail, elderly Chinese, wearing a long robin's-egg-blue gown. He bowed politely. " Do not let me trouble your chariot." He murmured the ancient Cathay formula.

Trelawny stared with curiosity, while Mr. Wu touched his wispy white beard with long fingernails covered by three-inch curving silver nail-guards, and waited for Trelawny to speak.

" You're a chef? " Trelawny came to the point abruptly.

" Chef? " Mr. Wu choked slightly, as though the gourmet's bluntness had shaken his frail body. " But I am unworthy," he replied at last. " I cook in large animals. Shanghai, Singapore, Bangkok. Have entered America for purpose of creating great dinners."

Trelawny knit his brows. He knew personally all the noted chefs in the world, yet the name Wu made no impression. He leaned forward. " Naturally, you have recommendations? "

Mr. Wu's Peiping accent was a little shrill and off centre. " I am very important chef. Elephants for Maharaja of Mysore, for Prince of Bangkok."

The shadow of a smile touched Trelawny's features. It was absorbed by Mabuhay's brown face and became a kind of hopeful brown glow resembling a rich sauce chasseur.

" Have you actually prepared elephant's feet? " Trelawny asked.

The old man nodded confidently. " Most perfectly," he replied. Then, looking at Trelawny discreetly, he asked, " You have elephant? "

Trelawny glanced at Mabuhay, who was smiling happily.

" I suppose there are elephants in season? " he said. " Can we order one? "

" Is special kind needed," Mr. Wu interrupted. He offered a scholarly nod. " Perhaps Sumatra or Siam kind. Young and tender."

Several weeks later, a large van backed carefully into the drive of Trelawny's estate. A wooden ramp was fixed into place and an elephant ambled down it, urged and cajoled by a suddenly animated Mr. Wu, who had gone to La Guardia Airport to meet the animal. He screamed and laughed and railed at the pachyderm, which stolidly ignored him, observing its new surroundings with small, lateral-eyed suspicion.

Trelawny watched the unloading with a serious yet pleased mien. To him, the elephant was simply a provision, like a case of red Grignolino or a barrel of blue-point oysters. With an appreciative eye, he noticed how Mr. Wu fussed about in his fluttering blue gown, pinching critically at the elephant's pillar-like legs, rubbing its hose-smooth trunk, and peering into its spout-shaped mouth.

" Have trouble getting animal," Mr. Wu explained. " Cargo people say elephant is for delivery to Siamese Embassy. Is mistake, of course. I overcome it. Take elephant anyway."

Trelawny frowned. A baked-elephant's-feet banquet, the first in the Americas, would be a feather in his cap. It troubled him that perhaps some Siamese might beat him to it.

" Is excellent version." Mr. Wu's voice interrupted his thoughts. " Sumatra-type elephant, you will notice. Is lacking tusks. Has longer trunk and delicate build. A tender youngness."

" How large would you judge the beast is? " Trelawny asked.

" She," noted Mr. Wu. " Is young lady of four tons." He fumbled within his gown, brought forth a shipping manifest which he consulted. " Paper is of opinion her name is Blossom."

Trelawny made a slight grimace. He had no sympathy for people who brought home animals and fowl, gave them pet names, then had no heart to eat them. When he fattened a duck, it became duckling bigarade, with possibly an extra flambé treatment with cognac.

" Blossom," he murmured distastefully.

The elephant turned her head and looked at him attentively. Trelawny started. The elephant had managed a careful wink—and at him.

Although Blossom was offered a hay-lined stall in the garage, she preferred the out of doors.

" Is better she be permitted strolling," Mr. Wu explained. " Binding on feet distasteful. For short time until banquet, a mahout not needed. I be her companion."

Thus, during the following days, the Connecticut quiet around Trelawny's ample estate was frequently disturbed by Mr. Wu's shrill voice arguing, discussing, and pleading with Blossom as she lumbered about. Mr. Wu might have been a suitable companion, but he was not much of a mahout. Blossom was sometimes stubborn and often mischievous.

As in all her kind, whether African or Indian, the inside of Blossom's head was spongy, a condition producing in her a tendency to be overemotional and to form strong adolescent attachments. In Sumatra, when she was but six years old, she had developed an unreasonable interest in the wooden pillars supporting the portico of a vice-consul's home. She would wrap her trunk around them, sigh, and wrench them away.

Because of this behaviour, she had been presented to the King of Siam, who had in his entourage a mahout who could do wonders with delinquent elephants. The latter had set out to train Blossom, but she had had such a crush on him and had been so anxious to please, she never did anything right. When the mahout screamed, "*H mit!*" meaning, "Kneel," she would carefully turn end-up, standing precariously on her head. When he beat her sensitive toes to bring her down, she would hold out her trunk with a winsome air, begging for a reward of tender bamboo shoots.

His first intimation that Blossom was different came when Trelawny caught her peeking in through the windows at him. Surprised in the act, she gave him a flustered look and ran away, moving with a kind of adolescent gawkiness, as though she were just learning to walk in high heels.

Trelawny was fascinated. Blossom was a rare elephant, really. She had already noted Trelawny's Edwardian waistcoats, and she clearly indicated certain personal preferences regarding them. When he wore the brighter ones—for example, the chartreuse with the embroidered fleurs-de-lis—Blossom was happy. But anything with checks or plaid made her moody.

Sometimes, especially when visitors came, Blossom could be quite embarrassing. She had a habit of loitering nearby, staring down her trunk with quiet hauteur at the women guests, as if pointedly implying their pelvic girth was in no way as remarkable as her own.

Much of this amused Trelawny, yet he kept his feelings in check. He was not prepared to accept Blossom as a pet, particularly after she had broken into the house.

It was no ordinary housebreaking. She had crashed into the library, carrying the french-door frame in around her neck, like a choker. Trelawny had found her standing before the sparkling

glass cases that housed his priceless collection of Carlovingian ivory carvings, eyeing them with studied disapproval. Mr. Wu had finally succeeded in shooing her out with a fly-swatter.

One afternoon, Mabuhay announced the labourers had come to prepare the site for the feast, which was to be an outdoor affair in the Cambodian style.

Trelawny went out across the lawn and saw the workmen digging pits beyond the duck-pond. Mr. Wu was running back and forth excitedly, peering into the holes, shouting, and fingering his wisp of beard. Seeing Trelawny, he plunged into a discussion of the banquet details.

" Is recipe superb for simplicity," he explained. " Four elephant feet, amputate at fetlock joint. Trunk also sliced to convenient lengths."

When his English failed, he ran about miming the digging of holes two feet deep and a yard wide, one for each foot. He conveyed a vivid drama of earth embanked round the holes, then the securing of dry wood—preferably tree branches broken by elephants in previous years—all of which should be piled up over the holes like a Hindu funeral pyre, to a height of ten feet.

" Ignite all!" Mr. Wu's eyes flamed. " When whole is reduced to ash, ten men with long poles, relieving each other in swift succession, rake out ashes, pitching poles to colleague, retreat because of heat.

" Now rake out ash. Two young men of athletic proportion, standing side by side, raise elephant foot to shoulders between them, approach pit together. Heave foot in. Add morsels of elephant trunk to taste."

Mr. Wu made a motion of shoving the hot earth back into the pits, then the embers. He kindled more bonfires. " When new fire is down," he explained, " elephant foot is especially baked through. Uncover, take out on spits. Now remains task of beating foot, scraping, and paring off outside." He tucked his wisp of beard into his high mandarin collar and smacked his lips as if ready to dine.

Trelawny nodded calmly. He was too much of a gourmet to be swept away by Mr. Wu's lively exhibition. It merely convinced him the elderly Chinese had the temperament of a fine chef.

Suddenly, from behind the two men came a snort of reproof. Trelawny turned and saw Blossom standing there, her ears extended wide, like flexible greyish-pink dustpans sweeping up crumbs of sound.

Mr. Wu paled slightly. " Sumatra elephant very intelligent,"

he whispered. " Very proud, sensitive of feet. Is hoped she has not learnt English."

Trelawny smiled in amusement, but the expression abruptly vanished from his face when Blossom's small accusing eyes met his. Trelawny felt quite sure Blossom *had* learnt English.

Some minutes later, while Trelawny was in his study, he found the imprint of Blossom's accusing stare lingering in his mind, and he began to feel oddly squeamish. This momentary lapse, however, was outweighed by the consideration that he had already notified his guests, and that, after all, his reputation was at stake. He shook his head. Next time he'd order an elephant without a name.

Sounds of a commotion outside interrupted his thoughts. There were screams of terror, followed by shouting and an irate trumpeting that shook every window in the house. He ran to the french doors and caught a glimpse of the workmen and Mr. Wu fleeing in panic towards the gate, with Blossom thundering after, trumpeting in pink, elephantine fury.

Trelawny turned pale. He stood there, frozen and voiceless. Then Mabuhay burst into the study and thrust a small-calibre pistol into his hand. The Filipino snatched a paper-knife from the desk, crying, " I run out and call policemen. Say bring guns! Mad elephant! "

Just then Blossom made her way back along the drive and turned up towards the terrace. She approached the study doors with a searching look in her tiny, angry eyes.

" Shoot, please! " Mabuhay cried. " She dangerous! "

Trelawny raised the weapon tentatively, then lowered it. Finally, although not one to make a profession of bravado, he gently pushed the doors wider.

" Shoot! " Mabuhay screamed.

Cautiously, Trelawny stuck his head and shoulders beyond the portal. " Nice Blossom," he said in a hoarse, uncertain whisper. His tongue groped for some useful elephant command. " Nice girl. Nice. Now, please, *h mit*! "

Blossom's broad ears flapped forward questioningly; her trunk hung pendent.

" *H mit!* " Trelawny repeated.

Blossom's smooth trunk curled. She leaned forward, bowing to the terrace flagstones and, with graceless care, stood on her head. When she finally dropped to all fours, she held out her trunk with pathetic eagerness.

Trelawny staggered back into the room and sank onto a sofa. All at once, his distinctive Cambodian banquet crumbled around him: he couldn't cook Blossom.

Mabuhay stared from Trelawny to the elephant outside, then back to the master. He gave a wondering sigh. "She like you."

Mr. Wu did not return, and it soon became clear Blossom was in no mood to let anyone enter or leave the estate. She was on constant patrol, and if Trelawny or Mabuhay tried to leave, she bombarded him with well-flung flowerpots or rapped him sharply with the tip of her trunk.

"Temperamental," Trelawny explained. "By tomorrow she'll calm down."

But the next day she showed no intention of lifting her siege. She had the run of the grounds, and she was happy. She bathed in the egg-shaped duck-pond and rambled about in the pale Connecticut sun, leisurely pausing to pick flowers with the fingerlike process at the tip of her trunk. She munched some of the flowers thoughtfully; others she spat out with disdainful vigour. But most of all, she enjoyed hovering around the house, peeking in at Trelawny.

By the end of the day, Trelawny was no longer amused. Once he had tried to fling an SOS wrapped round a paper-weight towards the distant gate. Blossom ambled after it and, like a huge puppy, returned it to the doorstep.

Later, when the two men tried to escape from opposite ends of the house, Blossom fetched them back with gentle firmness. Unhappily, the house was set back so far from the gate that no amount of frantic shouting could bring help.

Trelawny began to grow desperate. There was nothing consumable in the house but a cellar filled with fine vintage wines and a refrigerator stocked with yoghurt, and Trelawny hadn't eaten for two days.

He tried to make the best of the wines, but he was acutely conscious of the boisterous gnawing in his stomach. He even caught himself thinking fondly of a place up near Waterbury that normally he abhorred because the gratin de langoustines was always prepared with a sauce that was too short—too thick and not clear enough.

Late during the second night of the siege, Trelawny suddenly leapt from his sleepless bed with a shout.

When Mabuhay came to the room, Trelawny was pacing the floor. "Mabuhay," he muttered, "I'm so hungry I could eat an elephant."

"Blossom?" Mabuhay asked, his eyes widening.

"Precisely. It's either us or her. Now, if I catch her, can you shoot her with the pistol? It's a small gun. You'll have to get close. The eye or through the ear."

" You think you catch her? "

" I'll trap her. Soon as it gets light."

In essence, Trelawny's trap was simple. It involved a couple of peanut-shaped pellets made of salt, flour, and cayenne—just enough to give Blossom a thirst. It also called for a bucket filled with enough vintage wines to induce lethargy.

At the first glow of dawn, Trelawny laid out the wines. Some Châteauneuf-du-Pape and a few bottles of Sauvignon Blanc. Mabuhay uncorked the bottles and poured their contents into a champagne bucket, which he carried to the terrace doors. Trelawny examined the pistol, then set it back on the desk and resolutely went out on the terrace, whistling selfconsciously.

Blossom came round the corner of the house with a curious shuffling run. When she was close, Trelawny cleared his throat and said, " Blossom! *H mit!* "

The elephant's broad ears swept forward, and her tiny lateral eyes blinked. " *H mit!* " Trelawny repeated. Suddenly, as though delighted Trelawny had come to this again, Blossom curled her trunk, tipped forward, and eagerly balanced on her head. When she regained her feet, Trelawny winced. He held forth the cayenne pellets, which Blossom took and thrust into her tricorn mouth.

She munched the offering slowly, gave an enormous gulp, and looked about uncertainly. Spying the bucket of wine, she plunged the tip of her trunk into it, sucking up the liquid, which she then squirted into her mouth. Mabuhay poured more wine.

Blossom blinked thoughtfully and made a noise resembling a hiccup. Suddenly she turned and ambled uncertainly off towards the duck-pond, changed her mind abruptly, and hurried back to the silver champagne bucket.

" She wants more," Mabuhay said. Trelawny felt faint. Seven bottles of Châteauneuf. It was a great deal. Particularly the 1934. " Very well. Give her more," he sighed.

Blossom shot him a roguish look. She dipped her trunk into the bucket and squished the wine into her mouth. Then she peered around with an odd, gleeful expression.

" More wine? " Mabuhay asked.

All at once, Blossom gave a tremendous hiccup. It seemed to quake through her body like an earth tremor. Then, abruptly, her hind legs gave out and she sat down with a dazed expression.

Trelawny hesitated. Across his memory floated visions of Blossom happily chasing butterflies across the lawn; Blossom balancing uncertainly upon her head; Blossom holding out her trunk, so desperately eager to please. Trelawny shrugged the visions aside and signalled to Mabuhay. " The gun," he said.

When the Filipino houseboy reappeared with the pistol, Trelawny was staring out across the lawn at a car and a van that were turning in at the gate. Trelawny recognized Mr. Wu among the several men in the car.

" Is safe? " Mr. Wu's off-key voice shrilled across the lawn. Then, spying Mabuhay with the pistol, Mr. Wu shouted, " No shooting elephant! Is important! "

Two men leapt from the car and ran towards Mabuhay, quickly disarming him. Another, more distinguished-looking man hurried with Mr. Wu up to the terrace. He nodded frostily at Trelawny. " Tompkins. State Department," he said.

Trelawny looked inquiringly. Tompkins was entirely in black: homburg, suit, tie, and shoes. Except for his long dry cheeks, which were stained a candy pink, he looked as if he had just returned from placing a wreath upon a monument.

Without further explanation, Tompkins hurried over to Blossom, who was still sitting and blinking happily in the morning sunlight. Tompkins walked around her with a knowledgeable air, noting the tuft of hair on her tail, the characteristic depression across the dorsal surface of her neck. He looked into her mouth, studying the complex teeth. He nodded to the other men.

" It's Blossom," he said.

Mr. Wu gave Trelawny a distressed glance, saying, " Is Mr. Tompkins, American State Department, Far East man. Has come to assume Blossom."

Trelawny looked confused. " Why does he want her? " he asked.

" Unhappy error," Mr. Wu replied, nervously clicking his silver fingernail-guards. " Is impossible using Blossom in cookery. Is royal princess on goodwill tour."

" Princess? " Trelawny stared suspiciously from Mr. Wu to Tompkins.

The State Department man nodded. " Blossom is from the royal Siamese herd. She was sent here by the Government of Siam to make a tour of American grammar schools. Unhappily, there was some confusion in the shipping arrangements. Somehow she arrived here. Fortunately your cook, the Chinese gentleman, appealed to the Siamese Consulate for a mahout who could manage the beast. We were informed."

" But my elephant—" Trelawny began, an edge of anger coming through his confusion.

" Your elephant," said Mr. Tompkins, " hasn't arrived, or has been lost in transit."

Stunned by the curious turn of events, Trelawny didn't even wait to watch Blossom being coaxed up into the van and driven

off. Instead, he retreated to his study and sat there, a famished bundle of quivering nerves.

Mabuhay looked in once. With a solemn shake of his head, the Filipino withdrew. But precisely at the moment when Trelawny ceased rubbing the pits of his eyes with his thumbs, Mabuhay brought in a silver tray set with a small crock of yoghurt, a demi-tasse of strong coffee, and a dozen roll-enclosed hot dogs discreetly covered by a linen napkin.

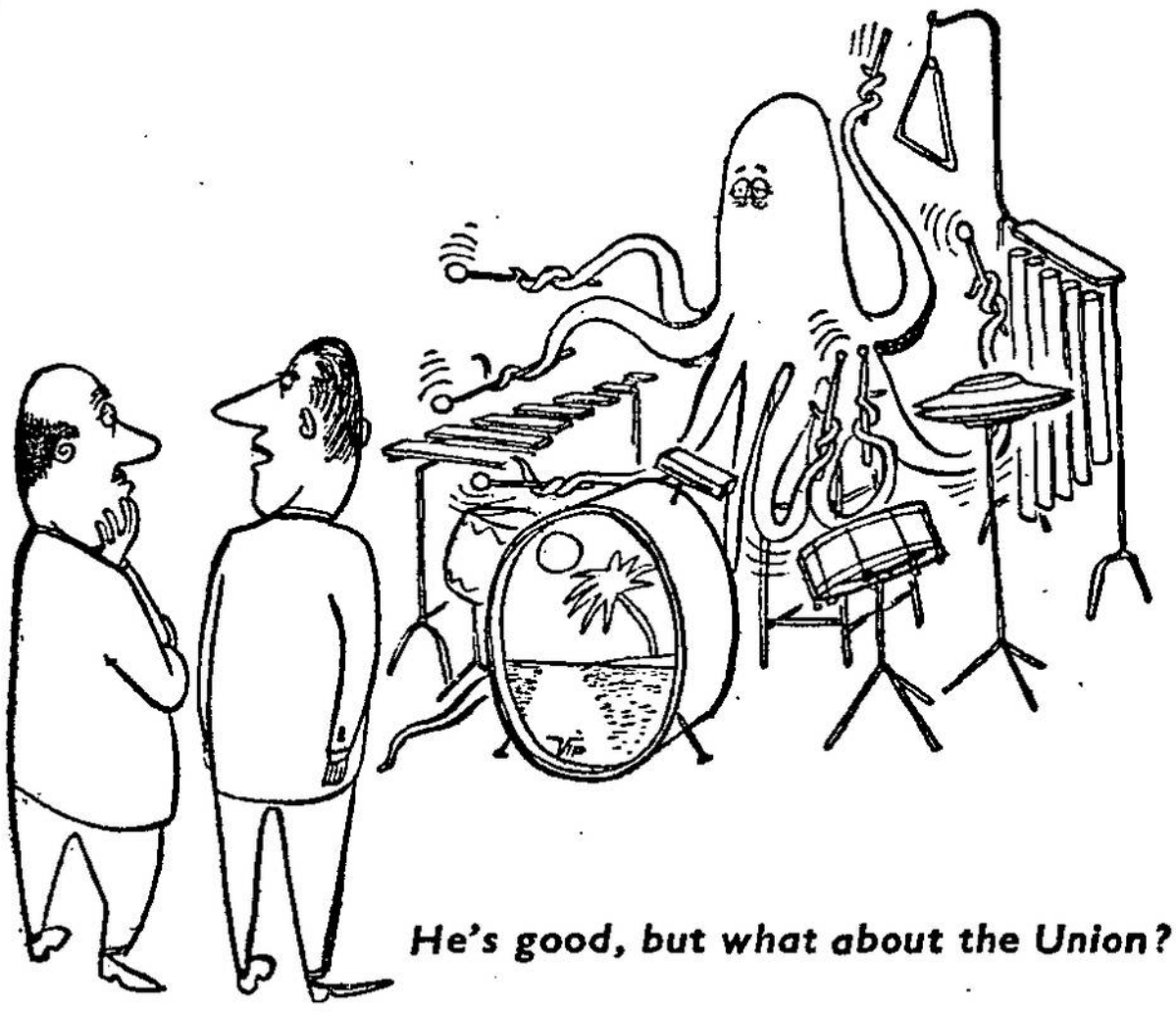
" Yet too early for shops to open," the Filipino houseboy explained diplomatically. " I took liberty to purchase certain provisions from all-night stall up road."

Critically Trelawny raised the edge of the napkin and glared at the hot dogs. He sniffed tentatively. Then, ignoring the yoghurt, he flung the napkin aside, chose one of the hot dogs, and took a bite. He munched vigorously, savouring, chewing, and rolling the flavour about in his mouth. Finally he paused, looking up at Mabuhay questioningly. " From that place up the road? "

" Hot-dog stall," Mabuhay replied solemnly.

Trelawny reached for another. He consumed it carefully, all the while staring at the remaining ones with an appreciative glow.

At length, when he was well into the pile, his face became flushed, and he paused, drawing out a foulard with which to mop the fine beads of sweat from his forehead.



He's good, but what about the Union?

Good hap to the fresh fierce weather
The quiver and beat of the sea !

A. C. SWINBURNE

I remember the black wharves and the slips,
And the sea-tide tossing free;
And the Spanish sailors with bearded lips,
And the beauty and mystery of the ships,
And the magic of the sea.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW,
My Lost Youth

The Enemy

The boat drove on, not really going fast, but seeming to do so from the violence of her motion, her abrupt jerking climbs and seething gliddering rushes. What shocked Cruiser, though he kept his feelings to himself, was the discovery that he was now dealing with the sea. Hitherto, he realized, he had dealt with the wind. In all his previous sea-service the wrestle had been with the wind, to use it and master it. In all his past at sea he had been conscious of the power and fury of the wind, and had found exhilaration in the roar of a great gale ringing and shrieking in the rigging.

Here, though it was blowing hard enough, there was no sense that the wind was the enemy. The real enemy was the seething leaping and appalling water so close at hand. All that waste of tumult was the enemy; and alert and on the clutch and on the pounce. Devils surged up abaft from it, and flung out engulfing arms that curled; little devils ran under the boat and knocked and flung up fingers through the seams; and the teeth of other devils flashed out at the straiks or over the gunwale.

As far as the eye could see was a dimness of tossing drab angry devils with grabbing and gleaming tusks and talons, with drift cut off sharp from the wave tops and flung flat with the stoopt scud; with strange sheers and scurries and dives and glides in the boat, who somehow seemed to find her way, guided by the hand of the savage at the helm. There was a strain on the leaning shoulder of the water-darkened sail, then a pause, then an urge, then a seething of white along the gunwale and a tipping over of more spray, and curses from the drenched men who were trying to sleep, and the drenched man baling.

JOHN MASEFIELD, *The Bird of Dawning*

The Lover

My love came up from Barnegat,
The sea was in his eyes;
He trod as softly as a cat
And told me terrible lies.

His hair was yellow as new-cut pine
In shavings curled and feathered;
I thought how silver it would shine
By cruel winters weathered.

But he was in his twentieth year,
This time I'm speaking of;
We were head over heels in love with fear
And half a-feared of love.

His feet were used to treading a gale
And balancing thereon;
His face was brown as a foreign sail
Threadbare against the sun.

" In seven weeks or seventy years—
God grant it may be sooner !—
I'll make a handkerchief for your tears
From the sails of my captain's schooner . . ."

ELINOR WYLIE, *The Puritan's Ballad*

Half Seas Over

the cockroach stood by the mickle
wood in the flush of the astral dawn
and he sniffed the air from the hidden
lair where the khyber swordfish spawn
and the bilge and belch of the glutton
welsh as they smelted their warlock cheese
surged to and fro where the grinding
floe wrenched at the headlands knees

half seas over under up again
and the barnacles white in the moon
the pole stars chasing its tail like a pup again
and the dish ran away with the spoon

the waterspout came bellowing out of
the red horizons rim
and the grey typhoon and the black
monsoon surged forth to the
fight with him
with threefold might they surged to
the fight for they hated the great bull roach
and they cried begod as they lashed
the sod and here is an egg to poach

DON MARQUIS

" There she breaches! there she breaches! " was the cry, as in his immeasurable bravadoes the White Whale tossed himself salmon-like to Heaven. So suddenly seen in the blue plain of the sea, and relieved against the still bluer margin of the sky, the spray that he raised, for the moment, intolerably glittered and glared like a glacier; and stood there gradually fading and fading away from its first sparkling intensity, to the dim mistiness of an advancing shower in a vale.

" Aye, breach your last to the sun, Moby Dick! " cried Ahab, " thy hour and thy harpoon are at hand! "

HERMAN MELVILLE, *Moby Dick*

LOVE APPLE

As the storm flung the ferry down river
I saw him—the man I loved

BY MARY LEE SETTLE

I MET Mrs. Hartner on the *Queen Elizabeth* in June of 1950. She lay in a deck-chair, tucked under a blue-and-red Cunard rug, staring with ice eyes back at the terrible Atlantic. From what I could see of her, she was dressed for her age as formally as in a uniform—a grey felt hat, grey suit, a delicate blouse. She wore violet perfume.

Her hands shook from the weight of her book, which was a new novel I recognized, crowned with a gold Cunard seal, and from the jigging of the morning sea.

You are supposed not to remember scents. This is not true. You smell them again as you hear music, voices after they are gone; the scent of violet charms this room I write in, and rose towards me when I passed the deck space this October where she had sat, an aged Beatrice, as she called herself, closing the book with a snap, and rolling her grey head towards me with a slight sigh, annoyed and full of knowledge.

She judged my clothes, my face, without hiding what she was doing, a little bored, then decided to talk to me, interrupting my reading without apology.

" You know, I read these books." She tapped at the crown which lay towards the sun, in her lap. " Sometimes I wonder . . . all this concern about identity. My mother always said, ' Jenny, remember who you are.' It seemed so simple—most of the time."

She waited for me to speak, then seemed to understand that I was rousing too slowly from my book.

" Girl talk," she said, after a little while. With her accent she almost said " gull talk " and I remembered wrongly, out of place, the beady eyes, close yellow beaks. She was not like that. She laughed away the words, then was serious. " You know, between England and New York, between the Anglican and the Episcopal Church, you'd better have a talk—you'd better, before you slip back into place. My father always said you had a place, like a sword in a scabbard . . . outside it you were every bit as dangerous."

She said this to the sea, which was now throwing sparkles back up towards the sun, magnificently self-centred.

I put my book away.

So we began, recalling, although she didn't know it, and I doubt she could still at her age afford to care, my perpetual homesickness; acquaintances in common, the mountains, the incredible green lushness, slow-moving deep rivers, limestone jutting out in the high valleys. All this rose and blotted out the moody Atlantic, grew and leafed, hummed in my head. But the talk was, of course, about people.

"My uncle told me . . ." "My grandfather always said . . ." We exchanged platitudes quietly. We did not talk about the world generally. For this she explained.

"The nicest young man came to see me when I was visiting my cousins once. At least I thought he was nice. Just as smart as he could be. But my aunt soon let me know." Her mouth made a small oh. "She let me know all right. She said, 'I wish you wouldn't bring that young man around any more, Jenny!' I tended to argue, you know how you do. She admitted he had nice manners and that he hadn't done anything *wrong*. 'To tell you the truth, he talks topics,' my aunt told me."

We both laughed. "Poor little old thing," she said, now to the ocean. "He finished fairly high up in the State Department."

I tried to judge her age. Later, from what she told me, I guessed it was seventy-three or -four, but she looked older. She must have been ill, or she had no fear of death, for she didn't imitate youth in one gesture. She was dry and brittle, grown, harvested, this woman, with a touch of the self-centred objectivity of the very old, or the sea she looked back at as an equal.

Intuitively a woman can tell with a woman when a relationship is moving towards confidences, just as she can tell with a man when he is going to move towards attraction. All women except the traitors are witches; beware of them; all women, I said, except the traitors, and they are that because they are afraid.

On the third morning, with the sea beginning to flatten in that grey-green spread that foretells the western shore, to my intense relief, she began at last to talk to me beyond the safe statements of her society, about herself. She began with a question.

"I wonder. You know when we met, I was reading some book . . . Can't remember what the thing was. I must be getting old." Then suddenly, turtle-snapping: "How long have you been married?"

"Nine years." Our heads were close together, and our eyes; the wind was so high it would otherwise have torn the words without sound, away from us.

"Happy?" I began to be a little afraid . . . the water under ice, beyond judgment observing . . .

"I see you are," she said. "Oh lord, I see you are, child." Suddenly a tear slipped from under her ice eyes, and she fumbled for her handkerchief. "This wind is terrible," she said, and turned away for a full two minutes.

"People think," she said at last, "that after the ripening of a happy marriage . . . that's what it is, ripening," she told me, and I nodded, my hair stinging my own eyes so I could see her in snatches.

". . . that that's all. But there's no truer saying than what the mountain people say is in the Bible. Them as has gits. And there's no woman more apt than a happy one, who thinks she's secure, to collect love like a magnet. One day, she'll take on a great weight of it, and lord, she'll sink . . . down, down . . . Oh dear God . . ." Mrs. Hartner was watching the ocean, and I knew she was waiting to let what she had to say come nearer, stop being "a woman," "one," "you," and draw to her, become "I."

"I," she could say, at last. "I was reared all over Virginia, sometimes with aunts, because father was a preacher, and you know how you move. He and mother never had a dime, but every time they moved, five thousand books went, too. Father always said, 'Thank God my parishioners don't look inside that solid brown leather. They'd find the classics and never recover.' He was a classical scholar . . . The Episcopal Church suited him, and it suited mother, whom I remember as reading until things just fell around her. They just read, and floated on the surface without a dime, and let me and my four brothers run wild. I took to books and my brothers raised Cain all over the place. Those two ways of discovery have more in common than you can imagine.

"I wondered later if my mother had ever had . . . what I found out. She must have. Everybody must have. You know what maudlin means? It's the way they used to pronounce Mary Magdalene's name. Oh, don't worry, I'm not going to talk about sin. Don't believe in it any more. Just about emotion. A lot of people think that's worse. Maudlin. Tacky."

We were brought beef tea, and the interruption seemed to make her mind jump a gap. When the steward finally left she began again.

"I don't know why I'm telling you all this. Oh yes, I do. You . . . I'll never forget a minute of the day of my marriage. In those days we had a real feeling of the end and the beginning. It was drummed into us. I was so scared. Women told more

wives' tales about your wedding night then than about your confinement. They scared you about that later. One of my cousins with a voice like a hungry chicken was the worst and everybody knew her husband ran around like anything. She kept looking at me and shaking her silly head. She was a lot older than me. I never quite forgave her for saying I cheated my grandmother about the fairies when I was a child. Isn't it funny how you remember silly things for just ever . . . Never get them out of your mind.

" Of course Tenny Hartner was the beginning all right. His name was Tennyson but everybody called him Tenny. When I say he was the finest man I ever knew, you'll think I didn't like him much—just admired him. That isn't true. We had—oh—what makes people start looking alike; become like twins in their minds . . . almost not have to say things." She shied away again from herself and looked at me and smiled. " You remember when Queen Caroline died, George, who loved her so, and lord knows went crazy enough, said in his grief: ' I'll never have a wife again, only mistresses.' Everybody thinks that's funny. I find it the saddest thing." Still, we were both smiling.

" Of course, Tenny was a lot like my father—a passionate scholar. It's so private, light, familiar, isn't it? " I didn't catch the mischief, and agreed. Her eyes glittered, as the sea had glittered earlier. " I could tell you things . . ." The sound of her voice was cold. She closed her eyes and let the scenes form against her old lids, forgetting me, forgetting everything, her face smoothing as she talked, growing beautiful for a little while.

" Part of it . . . a great deal of it," she said, " is downright funny. I can always tell those unaware and floating women, little johnboats in an inlet, that this will happen to. I was over forty and still pretty good-looking."

The eldest girl would have been eighteen; two boys, fifteen and fourteen; a late girl, six. I already knew them, their careers, their children. All those things about herself she told me long before this.

" It was somebody I had known all my life. That was the funny part. A friend of my eldest brother's. I'm not going to tell you his circumstances. They don't matter. It happened at my mother's—at a Sunday-school picnic. I'm telling you this so you'll be warned. Women have got to warn each other.

" Ah! " She almost said a great sigh. " It comes back. A Sunday-school picnic. She used to make everybody in the town help. I was helping, and all those young girls flitting around. I'd forgotten for the whole day what I looked like. I was leaning across the trestle-table, under the trees, where the sunlight

spotted and shook on the white cloth. I was putting down a big plate of salad. I still remember. So cool-looking in my hot, summer arms, I thought to myself: Oh lord, I'd like to be lying in that lettuce, curled around one of the tomatoes, naked as a slug. They used to call tomatoes love-apples. There wasn't a Methodist of my parents' generation who'd touch one. They thought they were poison. I don't think many Episcopalians would, either.

" Then, all of a sudden, there were somebody's hands on the other side of the platter. We held it between us. I knew who it was with a rush before I looked up, and for the first time in eighteen years of married life I didn't dare to look at a man. Poor thing, he'd just been passing by, and offered to help, by instinct. We just stood there holding that plate like a couple of fools. When I had to look at him, my voice wouldn't act right. But I said, ' That's mother's best platter. I don't know why she brings it on picnics,' just talking like a fool, a born fool. And I freed myself from the platter, and wiped the warm hair off my forehead, staring because I couldn't stop.

" He said, ' My God, Jenny, what's happened? ' as if that whole silly picnic had been struck still by some gong of heat and sun, and drew me down the narrow table, over all that fried chicken and cake and devilled eggs, till we got to the end of it, and then we just flowed together, and walked out towards the woods, not daring to touch each other.

" Of course, none of the rest paid us any attention at all—just two old friends, one wiping her hands on her apron, and still smoothing the damp bits of hair with a nervous hand."

I saw for a second the hand in her lap, quiet now with age, its tremors of its own accord, not to wipe her hot forehead, a woman full of love, who couldn't wait to be touched. Now it lay moving slightly, a chalk crab.

She was saying, " Him tall and slim and cool-looking, handsome and courteous, like men used to look at picnics while the women worked like dogs. He had what we used to call dash. But I'll tell you one thing about him. He's the only man I've ever known that I never heard an unkind word about.

" Well, we went on out in the woods, farther and farther, shaking, and then we kissed each other, at first barely touching, surprised, then harder, harder, like two creeks that make a river." Her mouth was shaking now and she dabbed the deep creases from her lip corners, where the spittle gathered. " Child, I don't apologize when I say we didn't consider. Of course we didn't consider. You see, this kind of love, this late love "—she hadn't used the word before. Now she had got near enough to say it—

" is very pure, even if it is as heavy as dying, and lord knows it's out beyond flirtation, or even desire, as you might think of desire. It's detached, a complete thing all in itself, and it hasn't anything to do with circumstances or other people. These poor little old girls who feel flickers of desire and think they have to run and get a divorce. Poor little old naïve things."

She was still for so long that I thought she had fallen asleep, and I watched the impersonal sea.

" You have something like it when you're young—adolescent. You suffer. But then you live in a love-body, and everybody you know is yearning and it's all expected pain—taken for granted. It's later you find out how incredible it is—when it happens to you when you think you're old and balanced. Lord, it's so heavy you don't think you can carry it, and completer, some way, because you have knowledge of what it can mean. You know then.

" I had to go hōme the next day." When she heard the sound I made she turned, arguing, after that long a time. " Well, I couldn't hang around Covington the whole summer. I'd left half my family in Richmond and I had to get back. You have to get back," she almost snapped. Then, calmly, " I forgot to tell you. Tenny practised law in Richmond. He was a fine lawyer." She added delicately, " There was always money there, but that didn't stop Tenny. He loved his work. He was awfully good at it."

Every time she stopped talking I thought she had finished, not the story she had to tell but how much she would let herself say, out there on the scrubbed deck, a thousand miles from the scabbard. I wondered when she'd whisper to herself, " Jenny, you're talking like a born fool." But at last . . .

" The next time I saw him was the hottest day I can remember in Richmond. I had just turned in the door of Thalhimers, there, out of the sun. They have awfully nice things. It was blinding in the shadow after that sun. His hand was on my arm, and I knew by his outline and his voice before my eyes could clear. I ought to. I'd been thinking about him for two years. ' Jenny, I'm glad to see you.' That's what he said. Not very romantic, is it?

" He offered to drive me home. I forgot what I had come all the way to Thalhimers in the heat for, I can't remember after all these years, but I can remember he drove a Chandler sedan. It smelt of dogs. He'd brought a dog down to school, then just come on in to Richmond because he said he couldn't do anything else. But he wasn't going to come to see me. He said he didn't plan that.

" Well, we just drove around shady streets. It was cool in the

car. About fifteen miles an hour. We just drove. You see, it—the thing—had grown in both of us. We were familiar, not shy; we just drove and talked. We tried to plan but we couldn't. The minute we did, it sounded ugly, trashy. But I knew I was going to go and meet him. I knew that all the time.

" All we wanted to do was to wake up together in the morning —once. Just once. It sounds so silly, telling it. It wouldn't have hurt anybody, just once."

She spoke to me as if I were the censor of the world. She seemed to beg. But what could I say?

" When I got home, I remember I got out of the car quick, not looking back. Did I tell you it was a Chandler sedan? I stopped in the hall in front of the mirror and tried to take off my hat. Somehow the wind had tangled strands of my hair around the hatpins. My hands were shaking. I was ready to cry. Then Tenny came out from the library and tried to help me. I had on two what they used to call ormolu pins—black and gold. One of my cousins had brought them from Paris. There was my summer leghorn and hair and pins, all tangled. But Tenny loosened it all, so gently, and watched me in the mirror.

" He said, ' I'll have to take your hair down.' And he started to lay all those tortoiseshell hairpins in a little pile on the hall table, down where the flowers had already begun to drop their petals from the heat. Loosened it all, and my hair fell down around me like a shawl. My leghorn rolled across the floor and I began to cry. You know, in those days I could sit on my hair. It was chestnut. I never used a thing on it. Except a little Golden Glint," she added, confessing.

I looked to where the wind tugged at one short blue-grey curl, like a spring, tugged and whipped. She still looked out to sea, and not to me.

" Tenny took me upstairs and lay me down and just sat there for a long time, stroking my forehead with a cold wash-rag. He kept saying ' Darlin',' in a surprised way, ' never mind. Never mind, darlin'.' I think he knew. I think he understood. I've always thought something like it must have happened to him."

Then suddenly, womanlike, she admitted, " I've always wondered who it was.

" When Loda came to call us to dinner, I heard him tell her at the door to send mine up. He said I had a sick headache."

She laughed. " Lord, I wonder how many secrets in the South go by the name of sick headache?

" Then the joke began. After all the decision I couldn't go."

I so waited for her to explain that she had to tell me, shyly.

" I was unwell. What a woman's joke . . . I had to send a

telegram. It looked so cold. All capital letters on a yellow pad.

" The day I should have been there my chicken-voiced cousin called me on the telephone and started to fuss at me because she said it was my turn to put flowers on the altar and I'd forgotten. She said I had a mind like a sieve and it was my mother coming out in me. I couldn't get that receiver away from my ear. She could hear me just sobbing away like a girl. I couldn't hang up and be rude. She said she was only teasing and I never had any sense of humour. Finally I told her I wasn't well.

" She hadn't hung up five minutes when the telephone rang again. She'd called my sister-in-law who wanted to know if there was anything she could do. Then it started. I suppose that's the way life went on all the time but I never noticed it so much until that day. I had nineteen close relatives in Richmond alone.

" Finally I told Loda to answer the thing and I locked myself in my room. The last thing I heard was Loda hollering into the mouthpiece, 'Miz' Hartner cain't tawlk, she got a sick headache.' Loda was always scared the telephone was going to bite her.

" Well, I wrote, I couldn't help it . . . a little incomplete letter, and promised again the second time. It's a joke from here, just a joke. I opened the paper the next morning at the breakfast table. The whole minefield had come out on strike. I knew it wasn't any use. Him right in the middle of it. He wrote to me then. I got it a few days later. I hid it from Tenny. Didn't tell him who it was from and he didn't ask, just held my head after breakfast and said, 'Don't worry about anything, darlin', don't worry about a thing.' He had a big case on, so he might have meant that.

" I kept saying to myself all the week in the still heat, 'The third time's a charm. The third time's a charm.' The children were at Virginia Beach so I had the whole house to wander around in, neglecting things.

" I rode the train to Prince—Prince, West Virginia. That's where he told me. It was so hot on that train I thought I'd die . . ."

I interrupted, now, wanting more. " Tell me about the trip."

" The trip? I just sat there coming into Prince and cried. You remember Persephone? I'm sure she cried all the way to hell, wanting to go so much at the same time. You can't tell me that girl didn't eat those seeds so she'd have to go back. After all, it isn't every girl gets swept off her feet like that. I always thought that part of the story meant she was pregnant; like those

marriages they try to annul but it's too late. The girl's seen to that.

" The air outside that train window was turning yellow, so still that not a leaf stirred. Somewhere up in the day coach I remember a baby crying and crying, far away. The calm was awful, like a great holding of breath. I kept saying, ' Oh Lord, don't let it storm till I git there. Don't let it,' and then remembering the third time was a charm. We got into Prince, just a junction, hardly a town at all. He had a taxicab waiting for me. I was to go to the ferry in that and meet him on the other side. He thought that was better. It was, honestly, the only deception we practised, outside of me saying nothing about the letter.

" The storm couldn't wait. It couldn't wait that long. The first huge raindrops splattered against the windscreen about a mile from the ferry. Then the wind hollered down the valley. It shook that old taxicab like a ship at sea. We bumped and wallowed through a narrow road that seemed to run with wild water. The driver had buttoned up those black flaps they used to have, and the only way to see out was those little yellow celluloid squares, pouring with water. Water beat on the canvas top with a racket that threatened to break it, and seeped in the edges of the flaps.

" The driver kept saying, ' They ain't no ferry goin' across no river, ma'am.' But I told him to go on because I didn't believe the Lord would play such a trick.

" Well, we got to the river. It seemed to rush at us, halfway up the ferry road already. Down there, through the windscreen, I could see the ferry, twisting and whirling in the light brown water, one rope already gone, deserted. There wasn't a soul around. I started to get out of the car, but the driver said, ' Lady, it ain't no use.' But I stumbled on and called out over the wind, ' Let me look, let me look anyway. Wait for me and let me just look.'

" I hadn't been out of that car a minute before my clothes were plastered to me, and the wind had torn my hair half down and I had lost my hat. I got down as near as I could to the water, but not too near. The river was throwing logs against the bank, against the ferry. As I came down the ferry broke away, light as a cork, and was flung down river.

" Then through all that rain and wind I saw him on the other side and he saw me. Neither of us even waved. What was the use? He just stood there like some mute Dante who would never write a line, just ship coal, and dream; and me, a middle-aged plump little Beatrice, soaked and bedraggled, with her hair half down, who knew when she was whipped."

The story was over. This old woman who told it, exhausted. But in one last flicker she said, " That was the last joke on us—the cosmic joke. I realized, coming back in the taxicab in a pool of water, that we were God's playthings, and I swore I'd never let myself be that again, be blown about for a caprice like a plaything. I told Him so. I just told Him so. Told Him to let me alone. I'd been living with God all my life and I knew better than to try again.

" And now you'll want to know whether you get over it or not. Don't be such a fool. Love isn't something you begin and end like a book or some damned symphony. You love for ever if it's what I've learnt to call love, and you don't have a certain amount to give, first one person and then another. It grows on you. It just grows, that's all."

She got up and threw her rug down and went away without another word, stumping angrily down the deck, holding on to the ship's rail in the wind, a little thin stooped grey back.

When I missed her in the afternoon, and again the next morning, I went to her cabin and knocked. There was no answer. Her stewardess told me Mrs. Hartner had a sick headache and didn't want to be disturbed. I never saw her again. On this trip home my cousin told me she'd been dead some time.

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ON SALE NOVEMBER 9

DEEP TREASURE

It was as if the moon had hit the earth and lay half buried there

BY JOHN KRUSE

WITH the drizzle turning to milk before our headlamps we pulled into Milawa, North Ceylon. There was no break in the jungle—just a few lights, the wet gleam of ruins, a bungalow or two, and a heavy, suffocating smell of trees.

The bus stopped nowhere in particular. The native passengers piled out and dispersed into the darkness. I dragged my spear-gun and pack down onto the road.

The driver was standing there in his driver's cap and sarong. He saluted and grinned. "All ri', master?"

"Yes." I rubbed my buttocks and winced, listened to myself saying twice, "Which way to the hotel?" The place had an echo. I looked up. The trees arched high into the darkness. The drizzle which sprinkled my skin was as fine and warm as condensation in a steamy, hot bathroom.

The Sinhalese pointed along the road. I thanked him, shouldered my pack, and set off.

The road was dark and had a feeling about it; sadness, heaviness—I don't know, but it was peculiar. Somewhere I could hear the sea; but it was not the sea I knew. It was the ghost sea that whispers to you from cowrie shells.

The Grand Hotel was a bungalow—a long, low string of white-washed cubicles opening onto a porch matted with vines. A Sinhalese in an ice-cream suit sat at a desk under a fluctuating electric bulb, combing his black moustache with his fingernails. He was watching a lizard on the wall.

As I stooped in under the vines he stood up and turned towards me dreamily. "Welcome, sir." His voice hardly reached me through the soggy air.

"Good evening," I said. "Do you have a room?"

The man didn't say anything. He opened a drawer and took out a key; closed the drawer noiselessly with his thumbs. He was smiling, like a man listening to an inaudible radio.

"To follow me, sir." The words were so soft I wasn't even sure he had said them. He led me along the porch, caressed a

door with the key, and I had a room. I had a rush mat, a wash-stand, a rope bed, and a mosquito-net.

"Dinner is being ready now, sir," he said, and withdrew.

I sat down on the bed and scratched my head. I had never been to Milawa before, but I had read about it. It was very old; you could tell that.

I sat and listened to how quiet it was. Not a sound. Not a cricket, not a footfall. It was like a tomb. My own tomb, I thought suddenly. The idea popped into my head, just like that. I didn't think it; it thought itself.

I slapped my knees loudly and stood up. I made a lot of unnecessary noise washing my face and hands.

I whistled my way along to the little white dining-room. The only life in there was a potted palm and an ancient waiter—in that order. The waiter was barefooted, and throughout the meal that followed, the only sound was me trying to be chatty.

After the caramel pudding I scraped back my chair. "All right," I told him, "you can go on back to your grave now."

He made a sound that might have been a groan. I beat it out onto the porch and took in a lungful of air. It was like inhaling a water-melon. This was going to be just great. I was intending to put in two weeks spear-fishing here. But if the evenings were going to be like this . . .

I went for a walk. I walked briskly towards the sea, scuffing my feet in the dark like a kid. My nerves were jumping.

It was pretty black and I didn't see the two fellows coming along the track until they were right on top of me. They shoved straight on through me as though I wasn't there, one of them barging me out of the way with his shoulders. It was so quick that I didn't realize it had been intentional until after they'd gone.

I felt in my pockets. Nothing was missing. I had a mind to go after them and knock their heads together. But it was too muggy for athletics. I let it go and went on with my walk.

Almost immediately a paleness came to me through the trees. At first I thought it was the sky, but as I drew nearer, I realized it was a dome. But such a dome! It was as if the moon had hit the earth and lay half buried before me.

Something inside me squeezed up very tight and then opened out, and I stood there, on the edge of the jungle, and tried to take it all in. I had seen photos of it. It was the Great Dagoba of Milawa. It was two thousand years old. It was solid. And it was just about the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

It was complete, you see. It wasn't just a shell; it was hundreds of thousands of tons of brick, cemented, bound, sealed. And inside it, I knew, deep down in the centre, and shut away

for ever from the greedy hands of man—was a fortune in jewels and gold.

It had happened in the dawn of the Buddhist era. The converted nobles, following the example of the Buddha, had put aside their earthly riches and locked them away for ever, so that no man should soil himself with them again.

I stood there trying to visualize those nobles. It must have taken a lot of courage, a lot of faith . . . I wondered if they had found peace. I hoped they had.

I don't know how long I stood there before I heard the singing. It had been working its way up into my consciousness for some time, I guess. Suddenly it had all my attention. It was a drunken, bawdy sound and it was coming from some distance away.

Curious, I picked my way round the perimeter of the dagoba till I was standing on the edge of a low cliff. Below me, the dusky sea showed a little white lace where it nudged against the rocks. I was standing on a headland. Some distance along the beach there was a camp-fire.

Its light revealed two tents. Half a dozen figures were lolling about there under the flies. Someone was beating on a tin. The rest were singing.

I watched them for a while, wondering who they were. They sounded like natives, but they were too far off for me to be sure. There was a rowing-boat drawn up on the beach near them, and out in the bay there was a lighter blob that might have been a small motor cruiser.

Holiday party, I thought. I toyed with the idea of dropping in on them; but they sounded too drunk to be good company. So I turned round and headed back towards the hotel.

I had just gained the trees when something started throbbing in my ear-drums. It was like a heavy vibration in the air. Suddenly the ground seemed to punch the soles of my feet and shift sideways.

I hit the rock on one elbow and nearly broke my neck. The trees showered wet on me.

Instantly the whole jungle came alive. You never heard such a din—monkeys, kaw-kaws, bulbuls, babblers. They tore the silence into small strips and kicked it into the sea. Bread-fruit crashed into the undergrowth. Dogs barked. Birds flapped blindly about overhead.

I lay in a daze listening to them and to the rumbling noise dying slowly away into the ground. When I was quite sure it wasn't going to happen again I got up.

An earth tremor. I think I was more angry than afraid. My

only suit was soaking wet. My funny-bone felt as if it would never be funny again. I looked round at the dagoba, half expecting to see it in ruins. But it stood there tranquilly intact.

The place was turning out to be not quite so dull as I had expected.

I made my way back to the hotel a little warily. I found the building in darkness. So far as I could see, it was all in one piece. I groped my way to my room and turned on the light switch. No light.

I went out along the porch looking for someone to ask for a candle. A door was open in the main building. A faint light showed through it. I put my head in. It was the bar.

A little scared barman was on his knees on the floor, picking up bits of broken bottle. Liquor gleamed everywhere in the light of the two candles he had stuck on top of the bar. Two men sat slouched at one of the little tables, watching him moodily.

The barman jumped when he saw me. He scrambled to his feet and retreated behind the bar, faced me, and tried to smile.

" Yes, sair. Come in, sair. We are open, sair."

" Take it easy. I only want a candle."

" A candle. Certainly, sair." He rummaged two candles up onto the bar. He was shaking from head to foot. " Terrible bad quake, sair."

" Yes. I don't suppose I could have a coffee?"

The barman jabbered an order through the hatchway at the back of the bar. " Coming, sair."

" Thanks. Pour something out for yourself."

" Thank *you*, sair."

I watched him slop some arrack into a tumbler and gulp it down. I asked him if they got many tremors around Milawa.

" Yes, sair," he said, gasping. " It is a bad place. Full of ghosts and devils. Two times since I am here—bad quake. One time sea almost to hotel is coming, sair."

I laughed. " Well, if it comes in that far tonight those fellows down on the beach are going to get wet."

The barman didn't smile. He began rinsing his glass.

" Know who they are? " I asked him casually.

He flicked his eyes towards the two men in the corner and back to his glass.

I rolled round on one elbow and glanced at them. They looked like town workers. One was a Burgher half-caste, big, young; the other a squat, rubber-faced Sinhalese with conceited eyelids. They wore white cotton shirts and shorts, and city shoes. The Sinhalese sat sneering into his glass. His friend sprawled

in his chair staring at me, with his big beige legs stretched out in front of him, and his lips pushed forward as though he had something in the front of his mouth he was getting ready to spit out.

I picked up the two candles. "Good evening."

The Burgher held my eyes insolently. He nodded his head the merest fraction of an inch. His friend looked up and tried to focus on me. They were both pretty sloshed.

"Care for a drink?" I asked. I was curious about them.

The big boy stared at me some more. After a bit he said, "Whisky."

"And your friend?"

"Brandy," the friend said. I motioned to the barman.

"Bad night," I said to them.

The friend giggled. He opened his mouth and dropped two betel-nuts into it; sneered round at us as though he had just done something clever.

The young one didn't look at him. "You American?"

"English. You're from that party on the beach, aren't you?"

That didn't seem to deserve an answer. I was trying hard to stay pleasant. "Maybe you can tell me what the underwater fishing is like around here."

They both started. The boy's lips peeled back off his teeth. For no reason that I could think of, he was trying to smile. "You see us, perhaps—from the headland?"

"Why—er—no."

"Someone tell you about us, maybe?" He sat up a little; drew in his legs. "The people here very curious. They see us in water with our aqualungs. Think we all are crazy."

It was my turn to stare. "Aqualungs! I didn't know you could get them in Ceylon."

"Oh yes. No—I mean we buy two surplus from British Navy. We are very lucky."

"I'll say you are." I wondered where they had got the money from. The boy spoke good enough English to be a clerk—hardly a well-paid section of the community. I remembered the motor cruiser in the bay. Maybe they had a holiday fund or something.

"What kind of fish have you been catching?" I asked him.

He looked at my feet. "The usual."

"What's it like in against the headland? I was thinking of diving round there tomorrow."

"You?" The eyes of both of them flared white in the candlelight. The Sinhalese shook his head vigorously. "Very bad," he said.

" Very dangerous," the boy agreed. " Shark. Many shark."

I was surprised. " What kind of shark? "

" Holes in rock full of shark," the Sinhalese cried, almost falling off his chair trying to show me how big.

" Uh-huh," I said, wondering who they were trying to kid. I had seen maybe one shark in a hole in my life.

The boy caught my expression and scowled. He said something quickly to his friend in Sinhalese. The friend looked hurt.

" He means they come in the holes there looking for fish," he explained. " Looking for sier."

Sier is the local name for king-fish—a fast mid-water fish of prey, which has about as much use for a hole as a torpedo has for a bed-sitting-room.

" You're sure you don't mean grouper? "

" And grouper," the boy said sullenly.

" You think I ought to stay away from the headland then? "

" Yes, you better. Very dangerous."

My coffee arrived. I drank it. " Well, me for the hay."

They both looked up; seemed to relax a little. The boy pushed his feet out again.

" Thanks for the tip," I said.

He nodded; stuck his lips out.

" I guess I'll find plenty of bream and horse-mackerel farther along the coast, won't I? "

" Yes."

" And cœlacanth! "

" Plenty of cœlacanth."

I chewed back a grin. That was all I wanted to know. I stopped at the door. " Oh yes," I said. " Just one thing. Barging into people in the dark. It'll get you a mouthful of boot some night. Don't do it! "

The boy actually did spit. I heard him after I had gone out.

The next morning I was wakened by the whooping of monkeys. After a fruit breakfast I carried my equipment along to the headland to find out if I could see my two acquaintances being bitten to death by imaginary sharks.

The sky had a murky tinge, the colour of chemical smoke. It had stopped drizzling, that was all you could say for it. Even by daylight the dagoba looked monstrous. I skirted it and stood among some oleander bushes and took a look at the camp.

It was deserted. I looked all round, but I couldn't see anybody. I shifted my view-point a little, then, and I saw them. They were all on the boat. They weren't doing anything—just lounging about as though they were waiting for something. I counted six

of them. Young native men. They looked like students—students on holiday.

My two acquaintances weren't on board. If it was true they had aqualungs, they might have been in the water, but I couldn't see any bubbles on the surface.

Careful not to show myself, I took a stroll around the headland. It was like a sandstone bastion stuck out into the sea. The dagoba occupied most of it. The rock was split and chewed about, and a great hunk of it had tumbled into the water, forming a promontory. I made a mental note: goat-bream. They go for spots like that.

I went on down to the beach then, on the side away from the boat. The sea was luring me. I was sick of playing detective already.

I stripped, hid my pack under a nearby rock, and went in with the gun.

After the night's disturbances I half expected the water to be cloudy, but it wasn't. It was as clear as alcohol.

Breathing through the schnorkel, I watched the sand ripple past a few feet from my face, slope away, divide into cat's tongues, and vanish into sandstone. At one and a half fathoms it was sandstone, crusted pink and yellow with coralline weed, crinkling like a pudding on the boil, dropping into grit pockets filled with blue, scarlet, and gold starfish. Moorish Idols, butterflies, and Koran fish hung tilted above the weed, or drifted up with invisible fin vibrations to take a peek at me.

At three fathoms there was brain coral, sudden, bloody. A big octopus, shapeless as a leather apron, sprawled across the rocks below me, swinging up each heavy eyelid in turn to observe me with one or other of its poached-egg eyes.

The sandstone unfolded, dropping away in terraces through water-strata of green, then turquoise, into a blue crystal world of no reds and great dark coral.

I turned in towards the headland and finned along slowly in six fathoms of water. Clean and deep beneath me, the sandstone seemed to breathe a little, then lumped into boulders about the base of the bastion. It was a fish-city, big and breathless, but gay as a china-shop, with parrot-fish, tangs, and red squirrels. They tagged in and out of the honeycombed galleries or rolled ga-ga eyes at me from windows and doors.

Well down at the base I saw a couple of fat brown groupers playing doorman in front of their holes.

I breathed in and jack-knifed, felt my legs slide down into the water, beat a soft vertical plunge down to one of them. But there was an upthrust from the slope of the rock and I had to

kick a little to get down. The grouper heard me and holed up with a lightning movement, with just his pointed nose and lollipop eyes showing.

Right, I thought. It was time for a warm-up. I knew that if I shot him where he was, he would bolt back with my spear in him and brace himself with his pectorals before I could snatch the line taut. The drill is to yank the spear out on impact, or settle down to a long fight.

So I didn't fire the gun. Levering myself down with one hand till I was half a dozen feet above him, I plunged the harpoon, still in its projector, into his forehead, and jerked back hard.

I felt him convulse through the shaft, try to get a bite with his fins and gills, slither—and he was out. I kicked back to the surface.

With the lesser magnification of the upper water he looked a lot smaller. Fifteen pounds, maybe. I killed him by squeezing in his eyes, ran the needle of my tow-line through his mouth and gill, unscrewed the harpoon-head, and withdrew the shaft.

A minute or two later I was swim-stalking out round the headland in deepening water. The boulders sank away below me, still clear, but with less colour. I saw a big black moray eel suck back under a rock, and memorized the spot in red.

Presently the promontory loomed up through the water. No sooner had I reached it than a fine flat silver-gold goat-bream came nosing round the rock wall towards me.

I did a foolish thing and fired at him head-on. I might as well have tried to split a pound note. He shivered away and my spear clanked against the rock. I watched him spin down through the water like a coin.

Suddenly, right down on the bottom, I saw the grouper of groupers. Blue-black, bloated, and motionless, he must have weighed a hundred pounds if he weighed an ounce. I reloaded as fast as I could, without taking my eyes off him.

He was deep. Fifty feet was my guess. My reel loaded sixty. If I couldn't bring him up first trip, and providing he didn't go more than ten feet into a hole, I could just about surface for air.

I swam round the promontory, primed myself with air, and dived. Fifty feet is a fair kick without weights, and I had to force myself down against the upthrust.

I sounded against the far wall of the promontory, levelled off, and squeezed into the narrow channel between it and the headland. I went through the channel slowly, careful not to tap the gun against the sides. When I reached the end I hooked my fingers under the rock and took a look round the corner.

Within eight feet of me hung the grouper. He was about three

feet off the bottom and he looked like a meteorological balloon with eyes. The eyes were looking straight at me.

There was a big hole behind him, but he didn't move. He was big enough not to have to worry. So he thought.

I swung the gun on him, bazooka-fashion, aimed slightly high to allow for fall, and squeezed the trigger.

The spear entered his gill. He blew a cloud of sand out of his mouth, twisted round, and streaked towards the hole. I snapped the check on the reel, hauled back hard, but he pulled me with him.

I hit the cave-mouth with my shoulder, and all but lost the gun. I braced myself against the rock and pulled, but he had got his fins wedged by that time, and it was like trying to tow a truck with the brakes on.

I needed air. Releasing the check, I unreeled upwards towards the surface. But almost as fast as I unreeled he must have been exploiting the slack, because within twelve feet of the surface the line pulled me up with a jerk. I glanced at the reel, it was all paid out.

I had to breathe. Cursing, I jettisoned the reel and broke upwards.

Panting through the schnorkel, I watched the aluminium reel flicker down through the water and hit the bottom. It lay where it landed. That meant the grouper had stopped retreating and was lying up. I made a quick calculation. The hole he was in must have been twenty feet deep.

That was a poser. Even if I could squeeze that far in myself I wouldn't be able to see to kill him.

I dived down and got hold of the line and hauled on it. It was solid. I knew better than to try and fight him out. He was too big for that.

I lay about on the surface wondering what to do. I wasn't going to lose that harpoon. I swam back to shore, parked my fish and the gun, and opened my pack. I had a flash-lamp in there, waterproofed inside a rubber glove. I strapped on a lead-belt and took the lamp back with me to the promontory.

I dived down, lamp in one hand, knife in the other, and swam into the cave. I went in a yard and hit rock. I looked around for the line and saw that it led upwards into a sort of chimney. I shone the flash-lamp up it. It seemed to go up a long way. All I could see was crayfish, hundreds of them, their antennae sounding the water nervously.

With a nasty feeling inside me I eased myself up into the tunnel. It was about six feet wide. So long as there was room to turn I was all right.

I crept upwards for about ten feet, probing above me with the light. Crayfish kept breaking away from the wall and looming up in the beam. They seemed fascinated by the light. Big plumose anemones shrivelled against the rock as I approached.

Suddenly panic got hold of me. I twisted round and beat my way out into the light.

I lay on the water for a while trying to convince myself that groupers don't share their dens with moray eels.

When I was part way to being convinced, I went down again and straight up inside the chimney for about fifteen feet. The hole was now a fissure—about four feet across, but several yards along. I had the impression of other holes opening off it.

I followed the line grimly upwards in the milky light until, by my calculations, the grouper should have been just above me. I got hold of the line and gave it a tug.

Almost immediately the steel wire jerked through my hand. I tried to hold it, but it burnt through my fingers like a scalpel. I cursed.– He had seen my beam and was swimming farther out of reach.

Claustrophobia hit me again suddenly. I struggled round and battered my way down and out.

Lying on the surface again, I had to admit that it looked as if he had me beat. About the only course left to me now was to secure the line to the bottom and visit it at intervals until the grouper died.

In the meantime what did I use for line? I was out of reserve. Hell, I thought. Just one more try.

I lay up a good time, saturating my blood with oxygen. Then I dived down and into the cave, through the chimney into the fissure, and up, tracing the line. Before I could check myself I was in an underwater cavern big enough to house ten tiger sharks.

Maybe it did. The lamp spun a fog around me that it was impossible to penetrate. The line led up through it like a bell-rope, and I went on up.

The pressure on my ear-drums diminished with every foot. That meant I was rising almost vertically. I tried not to think of how deep I must have gone into the rock.

Suddenly I saw the movement of a big body above me; heard the clank of metal on rock. It was the grouper and he was fighting to get a purchase with his fins.

With an exultant kick I lunged upwards with the knife. Somehow he just managed to flick himself out of reach. I caught at the protruding harpoon; missed. The next moment he was staggering away upwards, with me straining after him, grabbing at the jiggering steel shaft.

Then, without the least warning, he stopped running. With a quick twist he turned and came straight down at me. The spear hit the glass of my mask and shattered it. His spiny dorsal raked down the whole length of my body, and he was gone—taking the line with him.

Water filled the mask. I couldn't see. Complete panic gripped me. Blinded, and without the line, I was lost.

I knifed round in the fissure; clawed my way down into the blackness with groping hands. I hadn't a hope in hell.

But as I beat downwards something registered in my brain. I had heard a splash. As I turned I had caught the distinct thump of my fins in the water.

My body reacted instinctively. I don't remember twisting back upwards—simply that there was a moment of not daring to think, followed by the sensation of breaking up through something like a spider's web.

The next moment I had ripped out my schnorkel mouthpiece and was breathing air!

I lay there for a while with my mask full of water and breathing through my mouth. I was too scared to open my eyes. I could tell by the echo of my breath that I was still underground.

When I had recovered sufficiently I pushed back the mask and shone the torch around. Thank God it was still working.

I was floating in what amounted to a wide crack in the floor of a tunnel-like cave. The roof, eight feet above me, was hung with waxy stalactites. The air was fetid, and rank with something—a sort of animal odour.

I climbed out of the water and took off my fins and mask. I was just about to put them down on the rock when I saw animal droppings. They were big, liquefied droppings, greenish and not very old. I had never seen any like them in my life.

I flashed the torch about quickly. The cave was empty. The floor I was standing on was flat for a little way, then it broke up, rising in a tumble of rocks to just below the roof. The smooth part was littered with dung, and the residue of dung carpeted the sandstone in a thick dust.

Something grey caught my attention. I crossed over and found that it was a human skeleton. The bones lay scattered across the floor. I probed about with the light and discovered another one. Collapsed against the wall was a third.

I worked the beam round the entire cave. I counted no fewer than twenty-three skeletons. The animal smell was everywhere, pungent—a little like the stink of cattle, yet not cattle.

The sight of so many human remains filled me with uneasiness.

The place had the appearance of a monster's den. But for the remains to have got there, there must have been a way out, and that interested me more than the zoological aspect right then.

Strapping the fins and mask to my belt, I scrambled up the tumble of rock and shone the torch through the gap between it and the roof. No monster could have got through there; but there seemed to be a way through.

I crawled into the gap on my belly, with the torch pushed out in front of me. I scraped along like this for several feet; then suddenly the gap opened out and I was peering up into a steeply angled cave.

I hauled myself out of the hole with a gasp that was almost a yell. Cut into the rock floor, as if to take the sharpness out of the incline, was a flight of wide, shallow steps.

My excitement was so great that I didn't stop to reason why or how. I chased my jogging light-beam up the donkey-stairway, stumbled over some rubble, and found myself up against a brick wall.

The bricks were sun-dried and they sealed the cave from floor to roof—with the exception of one hole. This was about four feet high and looked as if it had been hacked out roughly with a pick at some time.

I shone the torch into it. The wall was about six feet thick. The hole went all the way through. So did I—with much grunting. The sounds of my breath spanked my ears; then opened out into a whispering echo. I was standing in big, empty darkness.

I shone the torch up and round. High above me there were dim rock surfaces, barely distinguishable in the seedy beam. I centred on one of them.

The lips were so huge that at first I didn't recognize them for what they were. Then I saw the wide, flat nostrils, the eyes, slitted, gazing into nothingness, and knew that I was looking at a huge effigy of the Buddha. His fingers were posed in the symbolical movement of turning the Wheel of Law.

I stood motionless for a moment, feeling the immense stillness of the place. The air hung heavy about me. It was the warm, sealed air of a tomb.

My own tomb, I remembered, and shivered.

I knew then that there was no other way out of this place. The air told me that; had been telling me all along, if only I'd stopped to think.

The excitement went cold inside me. I could guess where I was—entombed beneath the Great Dagoba. Locked deep in the rock, beneath thousands of tons of brick.

I swung the light about hopelessly; wandered across the floor.

One thing after another materialized beneath the beam; an earthenware vessel, a beautifully woven basket, two pieces of statuary, something that had the glitter of oilskin—it looked like a bag—a pair of pale, absolutely lifelike human feet. I moved the beam up them. The legs were perfect. With a start I jerked the light up to a face, motionless, staring at me.

At the same instant, two powerful beams of light hit me in the eyes.

"You!" the Burgher exclaimed.

"Where—how do *you* get here?" The second voice sounded like the Sinhalese.

I stood, dazzled, incredulous, my heart battering against my ribs. Suddenly I burst out laughing. It sounded like someone strangling a woman. "Holy smoke!" I said. "Am I glad to see you!"

There was a moment of shocked silence.

"But how do you get here?" the Burgher breathed, keeping his beam on me.

"The same way as you did, I reckon."

"Up through the underwater caves?"

"Yes."

"Without an aqualung?"

"It is not possible."

"Well, it is," I said. "And I can't get back. I've bust my mask. You boys have got to help me."

There was another silence. I felt them studying me. Something like a ladder in a nylon stocking started then, low down in my spine. I shifted sideways a bit, played my beam about on the ground uneasily.

"What are you fellows doing here anyway? Explor—" I stopped.

The hot, wet, unmistakable sparkle of gems pricked my eyes. Then the Burgher's beam hit me again, scorching out the image. He was wearing it on his head like a miner.

"He has seen," the Sinhalese said in his own language.

"Yes, he has seen," the boy replied. "Well, Englishman, now that you know, take a good look!" He dipped his beam in the big, carved-stone casket.

"No!" I said, twisting suddenly away from it. "I don't want to see. I don't want to know a thing. The less I know the more likely you boys are to help me."

"He follows us here and now is afraid to look!"

"Follow you, nothing. I was spearing fish. I—"

"Liar! Turn round!"

"No! For heaven's sake be reasonable. Can't you see I'm giving you a break in exchange for my own life?"

"He is giving *us* a break!" the boy sneered. "All right, if you do not look, you listen. Already in six days we take from here nearly fifteen million rupees of gold and valuable stones—"

"You're talking to yourself," I said, making blindly for the entrance. I understood that in his half-logical mind he had to have an excuse for leaving me here to die—so he was trying to implicate me. He followed me.

"You do not know who we are, Englishman? Remember Anuradhapura? Aruwa? Kimpala? Looted dagobas, that's right. We are righters of a great historical wrong. The Buddhists have take the great natural richness of our country and lock it away from us. What right they have to sit judgment over us? We, the students of new Ceylon, have forge ourselves into a key to fit the ancient lock. Already the old gold pouring upon new markets buy dollars for our country. And for us many rupees," he added.

I had missed the entrance and was in another part of the temple. The boy's voice surrounded me, echoing from every wall.

"We study the old chronicles. We find out that beneath this dagoba there is a temple—that from temple to sea there is an entrance. It was the last entrance to be shut. The slaves only just start to shut it when there was an earthquake. The mouth of entrance collapse, shutting in slaves. You maybe see them in outer cave. Well, all that we find out, using new intelligence on old documents."

"So you brought along a diving-unit to see if there was another way in," I snarled, swinging round into the glare of his lamp. I had found the brick wall, but it was too late now. "O.K. You forced it on me. Now what happens?"

The boy stood a few feet away, his lamp shining full in my eyes. The second lamp moved up beside him.

"Now we go, Englishman. We have finish here. We take everything."

"And what about me?"

He said nothing. The Sinhalese giggled.

"You ——!" I unsheathed my knife. "All right. If I stay, we all stay!" I backed up against the entrance.

There was a moment's complete silence. Then, as if by mutual signal, the lamps began to move in on me. I gripped the knife, shielding my eyes with my arm. I couldn't see a thing.

Without the least warning, something smashed into my chest with a force that almost crushed my ribs. It was a pick. I doubled up; dropped, gasping, to my knees.

In an instant they were on me. My knife wrist was seized. One of them kicked me in the stomach. I hit out at one of the lamps; smashed it; got hold of a throat. It was the Burgher's. He got hold of mine and for one long, grunting moment we matched strength.

I don't remember any more. The Sinhalese must have found the pick and swung it on me.

There was a period of nothing. Then there was a period of tangled something—great naked sins and hates and fears. Then there was a period of sickness, followed by more nothing. Then suddenly I was conscious of being conscious. But that was all. The inside of my head was like an empty cinema. No pictures showed on the screen, no sound came through the speakers. I lay there, stupefied, trying to think where I was.

Then I moved my fingers. One feel of the chiselled rock floor linked me up with the past.

They had gone.

I felt around for the torch. It wasn't there. They had probably taken it. Then I discovered that they had taken my mask and fins too; just to make sure.

I shouted then. Nonsense, swear-words, anything that came into my head. It was the silence. I felt that if I shattered it, somehow I would be able to see.

In a sense this was true. The echoes brought me alive. They placed me between solid walls and a not-so-distant roof.

I tried to stand up. But the darkness nullified my sense of balance. I fell over. So I began to crawl. I crawled through the blackness with one hand out in front of me. I found a wall. There were carvings on it. But which wall it was I didn't know.

I collapsed against it. What the hell did it matter anyway? My head felt sick and fiery. I started to decide which was the best way to die—slowly, by thirst and hunger, or quickly by drowning. I decided on the second way, but it didn't seem to make any difference; I still sprawled there. The immediate finality of drowning scared me, I suppose.

The mute air lay against me like an animal. It seemed to press me down so I couldn't move. I listened to the stillness of the rock—to its thickness and heaviness—and tried to believe that my soul would find its way out through it. It took a lot of believing.

Meaningless time passed. I might have dropped into unconsciousness for several hours. Or stayed awake for a minute.

I heard a noise. It was a grunt. I felt the hair on the back of my neck move. I held my breath, listening.

I heard it again. It sounded like a pig. I remembered suddenly the animal smell in the outer cave. I tried to think of all the beasts in the world that would make that noise—but none of them made any sense. Whatever it was had not been there when I came in. Where, then, had it come from?

The idea took hold of me. I twisted my head about until I had got the bearing of the sounds. I had to find out. I began to crawl.

Presently I encountered the brick wall. I knew where I was then. I found the hole in it and crawled through.

I negotiated the steps with the hurried, heart-thumping caution of the stalker. I was terrified that if I disturbed them I should fail to learn their secret.

I felt the tumble of stones with my bare feet. I stretched full-length on my belly across their cold surfaces and began to elbow myself forward through the gap. I took my time. I had plenty of it.

At last I could tell by the quality of the animal sounds that I was lying with my head in the outer cave.

The beasts were very close. The ammoniac stench of their bodies stung my membranes. Their grunts and occasional sighs shuddered the air. I lay listening to them, trying to picture them.

Their movements had a drag to them. There were scratching noises and soft, rolling thuds. Once or twice something whacked the rock with the force of a small explosion. But their breathing was the feature that scared me most. Their lungs must have been huge.

Suddenly there was a great rush of water and a wet flabby sound, followed by the swather of something big shaking itself.

I got it then. They were dugongs.

My last hope died. Dugongs are big aquatic mammals, something like seals, that live in the shallow seas of North Ceylon. Much hunted, I guessed this little community had adopted this cave as a haven against the harpoons of man.

I dropped my head on my fists. So there was only one way out after all. Supposing I could kill one of them, it would provide me with food for a while. And then? Always the same problem.

I remained there. There was nothing else to do, and the creatures provided some sort of company. They kept coming and going through the fissure, splashing and shaking themselves.

Suddenly a crazy, desperate inspiration lit up my mind.

Very carefully I began worming my way down the rocks towards the dugongs. If they had young with them I knew that they could slash me to death with their tusks. But I was as good as dead anyway. What had I got to lose?

Moving only when they moved, I worked my way down onto the flat rock. I could tell by the smell and the warmth then that I was right in amongst them.

I reached out a tentative hand. I touched something warm-wet. The creature didn't move. Maybe it thought I was one of the others. How they didn't smell me, I don't know.

I ran my hand lightly along the body. It was huge—like a pig, only bigger and smoother than a pig. I crawled forward a little. Something struck me in the face. I put up my arm protectively. It hit me again. It was a tail.

When it struck me again I grabbed it. It was thick and fleshy, shaped like a spade. The creature must have been rolling on its back, because it twisted over with a startled grunt, and the next moment I was being dragged along on my shoulder-blades.

There was immediate panic all about me. With squeals and grunts the whole community started to mill about. I hung on to the jerking tail with everything I had, arching myself along with my heels to prevent the skin being torn from my back.

I felt the creature I was hanging on to drop away. I turned a half somersault, snatched in my breath, and I was under water.

I have only a jumbled impression of what followed. I was dashed against the walls of the fissure like ice in a cocktail-shaker. The creature did everything it knew to lose me. But I stayed with him. I had to.

The pressure built up around me as fast as if I'd been going down in an elevator. Rocks, urchins, barnacles ripped at my flesh. For all I knew the dugong was taking me on a wild round-about through the rock, with no intention of breaking cover into open water. It was the most terrifying experience of my life.

Dizzy, battered, I was just about through, when I felt the rocks drop away. I forked my legs out. Nothing. Light beat against my eyelids.

Hardly daring to think, I let go.

Five minutes later I plodded up out of the surf and fell flat on my face. My whole body felt as if it had been caught in a fan. I was raw, bleeding, and there was hardly an inch of my skin that wasn't blue with urchin spines.

The light was blinding. I rolled about and yelled some crazy things. I guess I was pretty far round the bend.

I raved myself into a kind of frenzy. I pushed myself up and staggered along to where I had left my pack. It was still there and in it was my jack-knife.

I didn't bother about shoes. I went up over the headland, clutching the knife, insensible to the sharpness of the rocks.

The camp on the far beach was gone. But the boat was still there in the bay. They were doing things aboard her—stowing things—maybe the camping-gear, I don't know. All I knew was that her engines were turning over and her anchor was weighed.

I bounded down onto the beach and ran along it; splashed down into the water.

At the very moment I struck out, the boat began to move. I heard a shout. Someone aboard was pointing towards me. I didn't care who it was—I only wanted to get at them.

There was a rock barrier some distance from shore. I knew that the boat would have to turn along inside this and sail for a time parallel to shore.

I turned back onto the beach and started to run. If I was quick I could head them off; run out along the reef, and swim across their bows before they could turn out to sea. I was fighting mad.

I raced along the hard wet sand fringing the surf; splashed through a shallow lagoon; then over some rocks. I was running parallel to the boat. The next inlet I had to swim—up onto the other side—along. I was going to make it.

I had about fifty yards to go to reach the reef when suddenly I tottered and fell. I got up, staggered on a few steps. The earth shivered me off my feet again. I was so out of my head I didn't realize what was happening.

Then I heard the roar and I knew.

The whole world seemed to side-step. The trees shook. Still I could think of nothing but the boat. With agonized eyes I watched it from the sand. It was approaching the reef, even now swinging out into the open sea.

Then, beyond it, I saw an awe-inspiring thing. It was as if a monster half a mile long had suddenly turned over under the water. The sea swelled up and began to boil. A wall of displacement sprang up all around it and fanned out towards the shore.

The people on the boat shouted. I saw the helm come over hard.

I took one look and ran. I scrambled over the rocks, up between the palms, without stopping or looking back. Only when I reached high ground did I turn round—in a rising tempest of sound.

I saw the tidal wave hit the reef with a roar like an atom bomb. Spray kicked into the air, lord knows how many feet. The broken water rushed on over the coral-heads, up the beach, into the palms, bearing them down like grass.

The wave died, subsided. The following ones were smaller.

I stood on the high ground, gasping, and looking for the boat. But it was gone—smashed, I guessed, against the outer edge of the reef. Deep water, I thought. They would never find its cargo. There was something strange, almost poetic about that.

For a long time the sea churned angrily about the reef. I went down as far as I dared, and looked for bodies. But I never saw a single one.

I went slowly back to Milawa. On the way I had to pass by the dagoba. I didn't look. I wanted to stop and stare at it; remember the meaning of it—why it had been built—and wonder . . . But I walked on past without looking at it. It was just a whiteness to the edge of my eyes.

Act natural, boys. We all have a steak in this.

A CHARM OF SPELLS

Hallowe'en, this nicht at e'en
There are three wee witches on the green,
Ane black, ane green,
Ane shoutin' Hallowe'en!

After the Ball

" Have you ever tried a crystal ball? " the Swami asked, leaning across me.

" No," the witch-doctor said with interest. " How does it work? "

" You just look at it. It gets you in a trance in no time. Only you mustn't use it if you're tired. You'll just fall asleep. And if there's anybody else watching when you wake up you feel rather silly."

" I must try it," the witch-doctor said.

AUBREY MENEN, *The Prevalence of Witches*

Knotty Problem

Thrice tosse these oaken ashes in the air
Thrice sit thou mute, in this enchanted chair
Then thrice three times tye up this true love's knot
And murmur soft, " She will, or she will not."

Go burn these poisonous weeds in yon blue fire
This screech-owl's feathers and this prickling briar
This cypress gathered at a dead man's grave
That all thy cares and fears an end may have.

Then come, you fairies, dance with me a round!
Melt her hard heart with your melodious sound.
In vain are all the charms I can devise
She hath an art to break them with her eyes.

THOMAS CAMPION, *1567-1619*

Midnight Ritual

Just as the clock was striking twelve, three quite young girls appeared on the threshold in their shifts, each with a lighted candle in her hand . . . They clearly did not know that two wayfaring young men had been taken in and given the large bedroom, and the guests watched them in deep silence from behind the hangings of the big bed. Without looking at one another, without a word, one by one they dropped their slight garments on the floor and quite naked they walked up to the mirror and looked into it, the candle held high overhead, absorbed in the picture. Then they blew out their candles, and in the same solemn silence they walked backward to the door, their long hair hanging down, got into their shifts, and disappeared. The two boys . . . decided that what they had witnessed was some witchcraft by which these girls had hoped to catch a glimpse of their future husbands.

ISAK DINESEN, *The Monkey*

Looking-Glass Wisdom

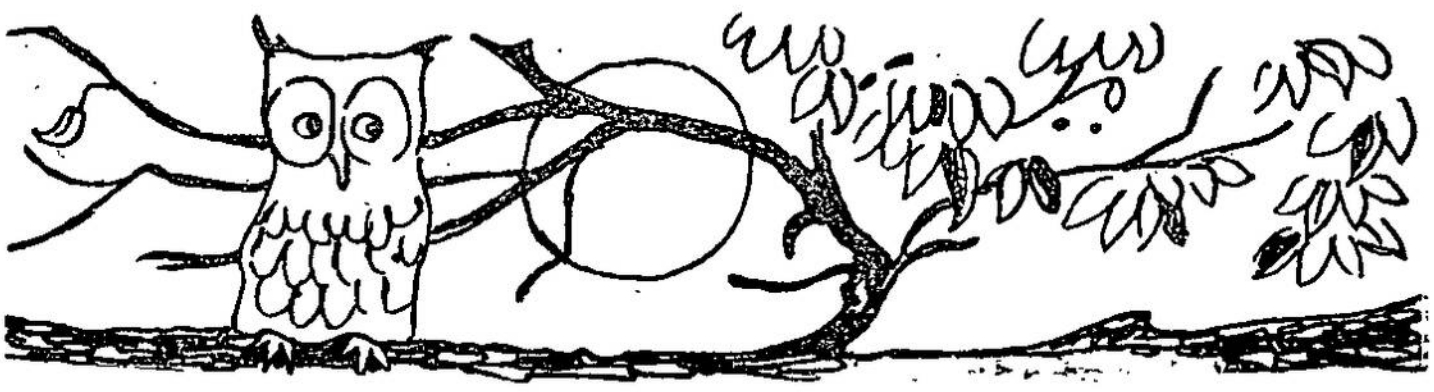
DUKE *All-Hallows Eve. If the earth is ever wise*
To magic, this is the night . . .
. . . tonight the gravity of mirrors
Is so potent it can draw the future
Into the glass, and show shadows of husbands
To girls who sit and comb their hair. Suppose
You try it . . .
There's the mirror. In your bag no doubt
A comb. And while you comb tradition says
You must eat an apple.

CHRISTOPHER FRY, *Venus Observed*

Widdershins

If two people walk round a room at midnight on All Sou!s' Day, going contrariwise in the darkness, they will never meet, and one of the two will be spirited away.

Gaelic Belief



Falling in Love

Before she goes to her room, she must pluck two roses, which have been carefully tended for the purpose. When they are in her hand she must not speak to any living person but carry the roses to her room and concentrate all her thoughts on the one she loves, repeating the old rhyme:

Twine, twine and intertwine
Let my love be wholly mine,
If his heart be kind and true
Deeper grows his rose's hue.

Then she must drop a small piece of wood into a glass of water and later her dream may be that she is falling into water and there, if fortunate, she may see the form of her own true-love who will rescue her.

NANCY PRICE, *Pagan's Progress*

Happy Returns

We've a first-class assortment of magic;
And for raising a posthumous shade
With effects that are comic or tragic,
There's no cheaper house in the trade.
Love-philtre—we've quantities of it;
And for knowledge if any one burns
We keep an extremely small prophet, a prophet
Who brings us unbounded returns.

W. S. GILBERT, *The Sorcerer's Song*

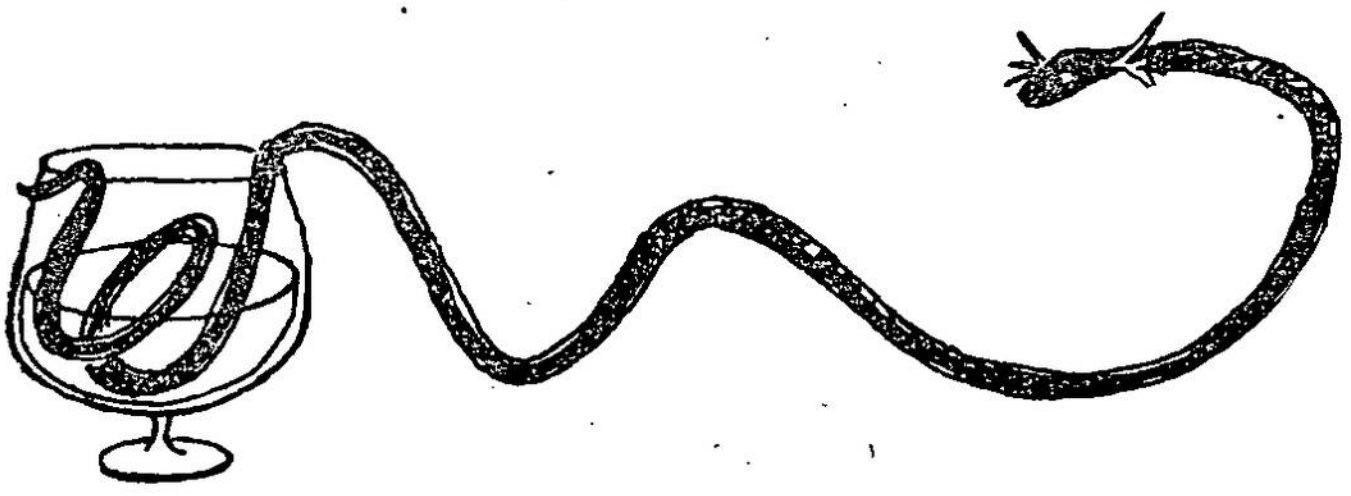
Lovers and Husbands

To bring your lover to you, stick two pins through a lighted candle. By the time it burns down to the pins he will come to you.

North of England Belief

To cure a husband of drinking to excess, put a live eel in his drink.

Welsh Superstition



CLEAN SWEEP

It was such a splendid idea
—he wanted to tell everybody

BY E. C. HORNSBY

HE lived in the gas-lit heart of that Empire on which then the Sun had Never Set. Queen Victoria in a state of perpetual unamusement sat on her throne not a stone's throw away; yet the house in which he dwelt was hemmed in by foreign territory, for this was Belgravia and all about stood the foreign embassies.

It was a great chunk of a town house, so massive it dwarfed itself and looked small like an ugly Victorian toy.

It was—next to God—the last refuge of the Family. In their heyday they had all of them been great travellers, and from embassy windows through the civilized and the not-so-civilized world had looked with contempt upon the natives without. But, one by one, in the eventide of their lives, they made the last trek to Belgravia, usually accompanied by some faithful retainer of differing hue whom they had attached to themselves in their travels, and who usually seemed to be in too high a state of terror to make a bolt for it.

All these Great-Uncles and Great-Aunts had their own rooms. In the corridor outside each stood some article too large for the room itself but too treasured to be banished to the attics.

In the boy's eyes these objects gave personality to their owners. Great-Uncle Henry's was a lobsterlike thing, all thin livid squiggly body underneath, and all dark brown enamelled tin bath of a shell above. Great-Aunt Caroline had outside her room a great wooden cabinet with a hole in the top; with her head projecting through this, she was supposed to sit, squatting on top of a lighted stove as if she were being cooked by cannibals with advanced culinary notions. In his dreams she stumped after him with a squat wooden body topped by a live grey head of incredible menace. Overhead floated Great-Uncle Robert, a disembodied head, hugely antlered, with a swarm of moths fluttering about his twitching nose and with never a leg, arm, or tail, to keep them at bay.

The Great-Uncles and -Aunts did not share much communal life during the day, but at night, when the dinner gong sounded,

doors opened everywhere and they would come forth like so many Lazaruses from the tomb, dressed not in shrouds but in old-fashioned evening gowns and dinner jackets. They clustered about the dining-table like a crowd of tremulous mice, eating hurriedly as if fearful lest someone should take the food away from them.

He was the only young thing about the place and he was known as "'Hettie's Boy." He knew Hettie had been his mother, but he had no idea what her relationship had been to this array of Great-Aunts and Great-Uncles.

He was a handsome boy, healthy and of good colouring, ringleted and blue-eyed; you had only to look at him to know he was a love-child. But that tiny hasty bubble of pre-natal love was all he was fated to know. The grown-ups, kind to him in an embarrassed way as a Family Responsibility, had no time to spare for him. He had inherited the Nursery, a gloomy upstairs room with striped wallpaper like bars. It wouldn't have been so bad if the bars had been real, for then he could have had the fearful delight of sticking his head through them to see if he could withdraw it again, but the papered wall was just solid, dull, and blank.

In it were some gargantuan toys. There was a solemn-looking white-maned rocking-horse, which rocked sedately to and fro and looked like a superannuated butler. There was a doll's house taller than himself, which opened to reveal all the rooms; in one, a bewhiskered gentleman in a smoking-cap sat reading a newspaper; there were maidservants with caps and ribbons, apparently standing on their large circular skirts, and there was a baby being bathed in a thing like a large coal-scuttle. In the Nursery cupboard were some very grubby books in which someone always died in the most affecting circumstances and went off to be an Angel.

Sometimes one of the Great-Uncles or Great-Aunts died, but he could never find out whether they went off to be Angels for he was always hustled out of the way whilst they were being hustled out of the way. All that happened was that their room was locked up as though they'd left behind something he mustn't see.

A further manifestation was that one of the other Great-Aunts always took over the departed's fur coat so that late in the chill winter afternoon you would see Great-Aunt Maud fading into the darkness of the Square looking both like herself and the late Great-Aunt Sarah, a sinister sartorial fusion as though the Family were shrinking back on itself and would eventually be represented by one figure wearing all the fur coats.

This is how Love came again into the life of Hettie's Boy.

He had been playing in the garden in the centre of the Square in charge of one of the maids, who, going off on some errand of her own not unconnected with a military gentleman in the nearby barracks, left him to walk home alone.

As he walked sedately along he came face to face with another boy, a Common Boy, a denizen of Pimlico, strayed beyond the orbit even of Victoria Station and its hansom cabs. To a nearby tree this urchin had tied a very matted, dejected dog. In his imagination it was his trusty steed waiting for him to throw a leg across it and gallop madly back to Pimlico.

Lord Shaftesbury might have loved him but nobody else could possibly have done so. He had a skull that looked as hard as a cannon-ball, and a big backside packed into patched knicker-bockers; he was noisomely dirty, ill-mannered, foul-mouthed, and nasty-minded; all in all, possibly the most dangerous little animal not behind bars.

He knew himself more than a match for the offspring of any bleedin' aristocrat, so he planted himself firmly in the way and said, " Wotcher, softie. 'Oo wants 'is 'air cut? Come on, put up yer dooks."

Hettie's Boy, whose name was David and whose nature, whatever military training might be lavished on him eventually, would always remain unaggressive, stared in astonishment. So the other boy promptly hit Hettie's Boy bang in the middle of his natty Little Gent's West of England ulster.

David gasped with pain. Instinctively he hit out with both his fists and by chance achieved the perfect knock-out. The ragamuffin flew over backwards, hit his bullet-head a ringing crack on the pavement, and lay stunned, during which time David, without any of that splendid English Sportsmanship which he would acquire later at a Good School, kicked him many times in the ribs and then, thoroughly alarmed, turned to flee for home.

It was then that he caught the mournful almond eyes of the dog tied to its tree and looking quietly on. Merely in the spirit of the victor despoiling the vanquished, he undid the dog and raced back with it to the house.

The door was opened by a footman, a pasty-faced, weak-minded young man who did peculiar things. He proved an unexpected ally, and they hid the dog in a shed by the side of the boiler-house.

Presently a howling urchin càme to the door but no one understood what he was talking about and the door was shut in his snivelling face.

It wasn't really love that David felt at first for the dog. But he

had acquired a responsibility. He had to get food to the dog without being seen, had to look after it himself, and that brought worry, and worry brought care, and care brought affection. It wasn't a high-spirited dog able to bound about and bare a set of teeth at the world. It was humble, dejected, and it relied on him; it said so from its sad eyes to its sad tail. He decided to call it Sally.

"Better poison it off," advised the weak-minded young footman. "It's no good. It's sick. There's a tin of stuff in the greenhouse. Mix that with its food. It'll never taste it and it'll be gone like that." He snapped a flaccid finger and thumb.

"Don't you dare! don't you dare!" raged the boy and, throwing himself at the footman, pummelled with both fists at his plush waistcoat.

"Here, hold hard," whined the footman, recoiling. "No offence, you know."

After that, David could not trust him any more. The same night he removed the dog to a tumbledown shed right at the bottom of the garden where no one ever went and where rumour had it there were rats, but better a rat than a man who talked of killing poor helpless dogs.

He was afraid that the footman might tell the Great-Uncles and Great-Aunts. He had a vision of them emerging from their graves especially to order the instant destruction of Sally. He had a vision of one of the Great-Aunts vanishing into the twilight of the Square wearing Sally's fur coat—not as a complete garment perhaps, but as a muff for her hands or a tippet for her throat.

But the young footman kept silent and David had other troubles crowding in upon him. He had a governess thrust upon him, a tall thin woman of a bony, chilly elegance. She had a faint sweetish smell as though she had used some pungent scent many years ago and had never renewed it. She was, as the weak-minded footman put it cryptically, "A lady all up her front and a bitch all up her back."

With her cold knuckly fingers she buckled the routine of life about David's young form; henceforward he was to know the Tyranny of the Clock, the duties that must be done, the burdens that little gentlemen were expected to shoulder.

His only happiness was that Sally seemed to be improving. She was getting plump and seemed more alert. She whimpered as if eager to go out, and yet when he opened the door, she only circled about sniffing and came back to tramp round and round before collapsing onto her heap of sacks.

He came to have a special feeling for her. He had no words

to define it, but it was something he felt for no one else in the world.

Then came the news: the whole family was going to Devon for the summer and he was to go with them. They had a country seat in Devon so vast that it even had weather of its own, which lagged appreciably behind that outside, so that the winds of March still blew icily along its corridors at midsummer, and the stuffiness from August blunted the edge of October's keenness.

At first David was excited; then he remembered Sally. He couldn't leave her behind; he most certainly couldn't take her with him. To reveal her presence would sign her death-warrant. The move was imminent; he had been kept in ignorance until the last moment.

He went down to the shed as if the sight of Sally might suggest a solution. She was lying helpless on her sacks, moaning slightly, obviously ill. She wouldn't touch the food he had brought but drank the water greedily. Then she sighed and closed her sad amber eyes.

He was frantic. He went off and hunted up that uncertain ally the footman and the fellow came and shook his weak head. " She's powerful sick," he said.

" Supposing they'd let me take her to Devon with us," said David, " would she get better there?"

" What, move her in that condition?" said the footman. " She'd die instant. There's nothing for it. In the greenhouse —you know what I told you." And he took himself off, whistling.

Either way, Sally would die: left here or moved, she was fenced in by death; whatever David did would only set it toppling down upon her. Sally moaned and moved restlessly. David remembered the pain when the rough boy had hit him. It set him flying off to the greenhouse.

There was the tin. He clasped it in his gloved hands—he always had to wear gloves now, Miss Coldharbour had ordained it so.

He went back to the house, holding the tin quite openly. He couldn't bear to give it to Sally yet.

He went in through the kitchen. The cook and some of the maids were in the still-room. They were talking excitedly together and he caught the name " Coldharbour " every now and then, and they laughed and jeered spitefully every time they said it.

There was a great pan on the range and from it came the spicy odours of the East. It was the stockpot, and evidently the Nabobs among the Great-Uncles were having their favourite

mulligatawny soup for dinner, and the others would just have to like it. David climbed on a stool, took up the great iron spoon, and gave the spicy mess a reflective twirl. He hoped it might help him to think.

It did. A great idea came to him.

If only all the Great-Aunts and Great-Uncles were taken ill, too ill to travel tomorrow . . . It would give Sally a respite. By the time they were well again Sally also might have recovered. He pictured her restored to health, a splendid appealing creature like those in the pictures that his Great-Aunts admired so much by a man called Landseer.

He had a vision of the Great-Aunts and Great-Uncles, newly recovered, standing in an admiring circle and saying: "What a magnificent animal! What a perfect pair they make! We must never, never part them." They might even get Landseer to come along and paint them.

It was such a splendid simple idea he wanted to shout aloud, to run round telling everybody. Perhaps he would—afterwards. Meantime he poured the contents of the tin into the stockpot and stirred vigorously. It smelt delicious—better than ever.

Then he got down and ran happily off. He met Miss Coldharbour in the upstairs corridor and immediately sobered down. To his surprise, she looked right through him with cold red-rimmed eyes and vanished without a word into her own room.

He stood amazed. There was surely something somewhere about his person or attire that she could have pulled him up about. He went along and met his Great-Aunt Jane.

"Miss Coldharbour—" he began, but his Great-Aunt Jane drew herself up and spoke down to him from a great height.

"Miss Coldharbour is leaving us," she said. "Immediately —tonight. She is not suitable to be trusted with a Young Person. Go to your room, boy, and behave. We shall find you a new governess directly. Be a good boy and pray; pray that you may not grow up to be like your Great-Uncle Thomas."

And off she went. This was news indeed. Like a moth attracted to the flame, wishing perhaps only for one last gloating glance at the disgraced Miss Coldharbour, he crept along the corridor to her room. She was not in it, but there were signs of hasty packing.

He realized that he was still holding the empty tin and pushed it aimlessly into one of the open trunks, tucking it in carefully under the clothes, which gave off a great gust of her sickly faint odour.

Then he went to his room and obediently prayed not to be like his Great-Uncle Thomas who had a wart each side of his nose.

The gong sounded, the tombs opened, the corpses came forth, there was an agitation of spoons and dishes. The smell of mulligatawny rose like the cry of the muezzin.

Suddenly there was a hubbub, a running-about of many feet, a raising of many voices, a flurry of people frenziedly going for the doctor—not one doctor but many, for each Great-Aunt and Great-Uncle had his or her own particular doctor and they were all sent for.

Forgotten, David was free to peer out of the window at the carriages which kept dashing up. Then came the police, burly men who saw life hazily through a tangle of beard by the aid of oil lanterns.

Presently through the banisters he saw them carrying out the Family: first of all, Great-Aunt Caroline, the great beak of her nose sticking up like a sail, swam smoothly and majestically out of the door and out of this world. After her, like a flotilla, came all the other Great-Aunts and Great-Uncles—Thomas a little in the rear as if lingering for a last wink at Miss Coldharbour.

David counted them on his fingers—five, six, seven, all of them. He would be the only one left. What a lot of fur coats he would have! He pictured himself parading about in them, dragging them along behind him like the robes of a king.

There was a pause, and finally two policemen emerged with Miss Coldharbour in between them. Her arms and legs seemed loose and her head jerked from side to side and backwards and forwards like a marionette's with its strings broken. David was a kind boy; he prayed that wherever it was they were taking her they would string her up properly again.

In the background the native servants made wild native noises and waved fists. Everyone had forgotten David. He was free to slip down the backstairs to Sally.

In the garden he met a little dark boy from the Embassy next door.

"Good evening, please," said the dark boy, bowing politely, "I came for my ball. Your Great-Aunts and Great-Uncles will not permit it to me at day, so I come over at night."

"They won't stop you any more," said David importantly, "They have all gone. I'm the King of the Castle now."

"You are Mister Swankpot," said the dark boy, with another gracious bow. "Where to have your Great-Uncles and Great-Aunts gone, please?"

David considered. Recollections of his nursery reading came back to him. "To Heaven, I suppose," he said, a little doubtfully. "They are dead."

"People do not go to Heaven when they die," said the dark boy. "That is a lie. They go into the bodies of animals, upwards or downwards as they have lived. No doubt your Great-Uncles and Great-Aunts who would not return to me my ball are now the very lowest of vermin. Good night, please."

He bowed again and with dignity climbed back into his own country. David went on to the shed, gravely perturbed.

He thought of his Great-Uncles and Great-Aunts as some loathsome form of life, perhaps even those horrid slug things that came out of the kitchen sink sometimes and had to be covered in salt, in which they perished miserably. It worried him greatly. He felt lonely; something he hadn't prized very much had been taken away and it had left a vacuum behind.

He opened the shed. The darkness was as full of movement as a city at night. He found a stub of candle and lit it.

Sally was lying in a semicircle of puppies. They heaved and panted and made blind little attempts to lift themselves. They were warm and helpless and lovable and Sally in their midst was relaxed and happy. Illumination came to David.

He counted breathlessly, his whole being one inarticulate prayer—five, six, yes, seven—one for each of his Great-Uncles and Great-Aunts. It was into these dear little scraps of life that a kindly Fate—with some assistance from him—had changed them.

He dropped amongst them with cries of endearment.

Close by he saw Sally, her eyes fixed on him. In that second, recognition came like a revelation.

"Oh, Mamma, Mamma," he cried, and dropped down amongst the others, and she licked them all indiscriminately.

★ ★ ★

SOLUTIONS to NOUGHTS AND CROSSES on page 42

1. *Henna leaves, used in Egypt and Asia to colour hair, nails, and skin*
2. *Battle of Bunker Hill, 1775, in the American War of Independence*
3. *The people of France*
4. *Death, War, Famine, Pestilence*
5. *Fifty thousand dollars*
6. *People who went to California in the gold rush of 1849*
7. *1 A.D.*
8. *a. Tornado in Australia; b. Writing implement used in spiritualist seance; c. Steam-organ; d. Species of large lizard*
9. *a. Mr. Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson; b. Bruno, Lewis Carroll; c. Criseyde, Chaucer; or Cressida, Shakespeare*

HEIGHT OF DANGER

Something kept her from crying out —something stronger than fear

BY ARTHUR GORDON

I AM always glad to get back to Paris, and I was particularly glad this last time. I had been in the Sahara for six weeks with a crew of French geologists, doing a series of articles on oil hunters. It had been six weeks of blazing sun and burning sand, tinned water, no news, and not very clean Arabs. But now I was in Paris again.

Along the boulevards, the chestnut trees were showing green. The pavement cafés were crowded. The taxis hooted their strident horns. This was Paris—charming, indolent, and whimsical. I was enchanted to be there.

I had no particular plans beyond a long, hot bath, a civilized drink, and a good dinner. After that—well, something would turn up. And it did.

When I went into the hotel bar at seven-thirty, the first person I saw was Tony Ashurst. We had gone to the same school, Tony Ashurst and I, and to the same college. And then, after going our separate ways, we had been thrown together again during the war.

I had always liked him, even though some people said having too much money had spoilt him. I didn't agree. He had the nerve not to work—it takes quite a lot in our society—and he had plenty of physical courage.

Mountaineering was his passion. He had climbed most of the great peaks, including one in Peru that had never been scaled before. But he never talked much about his accomplishments. He was quite shy, really, and sensitive and proud. He looked rather like a Spaniard with his dark hair and sunburnt skin and intense eyes, but he was pure Philadelphia.

He was not a big man; he was light and wiry, the way most great climbers are. Usually there was a kind of tension about him, but now, sitting alone at the bar, he looked almost boyishly happy. "Why, Jim," he said, when I walked up to him, "it's good to see you!"

" It's good to see you too," I said, and hesitated, wondering whether or not to ask about Karen, his wife. I had heard a rumour that their marriage was not going smoothly. I decided not to risk it. " What've you been doing? " I asked, sitting beside him.

He looked faintly surprised. " You mean you haven't seen the papers? "

" Where I've been," I said, " there weren't any papers." I told him about the oil series.

" Then you haven't heard of the Ashurst discovery? "

I shook my head. " It wasn't oil, by any chance? "

He smiled and said, " No, it . . . Look, I'd like to talk to you, Jim, if you have the time."

We ordered drinks and went over to a table. Tony looked at me for a moment and then he said, " You know, Jim, you're the first person I've met who didn't begin by *asking* me about this business. Since you know nothing about it, I'd like to try an experiment with you. I'd like to tell the story from the beginning —something I haven't been able to do with anyone else—and see what you make of it."

Our martinis arrived. I had all the time in the world. " Go ahead," I said.

After a moment he said, " I feel a little hesitant about this. You'll see why. But even so, I feel like sharing this story with someone, someone I've known for a long time. And you're the first person I've found that I *could* tell it to. Aren't you flattered? " he asked, smiling.

" Very," I said. As a matter of fact, I was.

He squared his shoulders a little, like a diver on a high board. " It really began four years ago," he said, " when Karen and I were married."

I remember their wedding; it was the social event of the season, a big splashy affair with marquees on the lawn and all the champagne you could drink. It was a spectacular beginning, and for a year or two the marriage went very well. Tony and Karen travelled constantly; they circled the earth on one long honeymoon.

But then their happiness began to alter. It wasn't that they had grown bored with each other physically or anything like that. It was just that every man needs a sense of achievement—even if it comes only from conquering jagged masses of rock—and Karen hated the mountains.

She was afraid of heights and she hated climbing. It terrified her. Tony tried to make her see that being afraid was no

disgrace, that fear could be overcome. But it was no use; Karen wanted no part of mountain climbing.

She never tried to stop Tony from going—he was careful to give her credit for that—but whenever he set out alone, it was with a sense of guilt for having left Karen behind. At first he went off on short trips, weekend climbs, but it was no good. Karen wouldn't say a word, but he knew she was upset. She hated to have him go, and this ruined everything. He felt guilty about leaving her, guilty about pursuing the only real interest he had outside their marriage. It enraged him, this feeling of guilt. He began to resent Karen terribly—on account of it.

He looked at me with a puzzled expression. "Can you see how that might be?" he asked.

"Nobody likes the person who makes him feel guilty," I said, "or weak."

He nodded. "Last winter, as you know," he said, "I organized that expedition to the Andes. Winter here, of course, is summer down there. I told Karen that I didn't want her with me—I'm not sure yet whether I made that decision to punish Karen or to emancipate myself. I told her she could wait in Philadelphia or London or Paris, but I didn't want her anywhere in South America. I was going to try to be the first man to climb La Dolorosa, and I didn't want any distractions.

"I put it pretty brutally, the way you always do when you're trying to justify selfishness. She didn't say much, but I knew she was hurt and angry. I almost called the expedition off. But in the end I told myself that that would just be—as you said—a sign of weakness."

Our glasses were empty. Tony signalled the barman with an almost imperceptible gesture. He did not resume his story until the waiter had come and gone.

"As it turned out," he said finally, "I was away even longer than the three months I had planned. After we climbed La Dolorosa the weather held, and we took a shot at El Capitan. We didn't make it, but"—he grinned—"we came darned close. Next time, maybe . . .". He paused and sipped his drink. "While I was gone, Karen stayed here, in Paris. I came back in June, feeling pretty good about everything. A little penitent, maybe, for having kept her waiting so long, but the trouble was—" he hesitated, not looking at me, and I saw his fingers tighten around the stem of his glass—"she thought she had found someone else."

I said nothing. I could think of nothing to say.

"She told me herself, the night I got back. She was miserable about it, really. She told me because she was sure that if she

didn't, someone we knew would. She said she supposed she had done it to punish me for leaving her. She was awfully sorry, she said; she wasn't even infatuated with this other fellow any more. That was all over, and she was in love with me. She always had been. She—she asked me to forgive her."

It was cool there in the bar, but there were tiny beads of sweat on Tony Ashurst's forehead.

"Heaven knows," he said, "I wanted to—I tried. I told myself I had had this coming. She had been no more faithless to me, in a way, than I had been to her. Karen's a beautiful girl, high-spirited, proud. I could understand it all, rationally. But emotionally"—he shook his head—"I couldn't take it. We weren't man and wife any more; we were like strangers. That went on for months. Then, about three weeks ago, I told her we were through. I said I thought we should get a divorce."

Somewhere across the room a woman was laughing; there was a subdued murmur of conversation.

"The next day," Tony went on, "Karen asked me to take her away—to the mountains. She said we ought to give our marriage one more chance. She thought, I guess, that if she made this—this surrender to my interests, perhaps I could make a concession as well. She hoped I would be able to forgive her. Anyway, we went. I didn't plan to do any real climbing, of course, but I thought if we got up fairly high, around ten or eleven thousand feet, well away from the tourist resorts, we might gain a better perspective of our problem. I thought we'd spend a few days tramping around on the Lac de Glace, the glacier above Stehl."

He paused again. He wasn't filling in the details, but I could see it all, see them setting out with their expensive luggage in their handsome car, giving an impression of wealth and happiness, but actually thoroughly miserable.

Tony rubbed his chin, his eyes not seeing the room or people around us. "Glaciers," he said, "they're really fascinating. They still cover ten per cent of the globe, you know, and there's evidence that they once covered thirty. Down in the south-polar regions they say the ice-cap is two miles thick."

I nodded impatiently. I was not interested in glaciers. I wanted to hear what had happened to this man and his wife.

"The Lac de Glace," he said, "is the Piedmont type, a large, nearly motionless ice-sheet. There's almost no drainage; evaporation balances snowfall. There are some crevasses, of course, but nothing really dangerous. It seemed a good place to go . . ."

They stayed at the only inn Stehl had to offer, a funny old

place called the Lion d'Or. Every day they took their lunch and climbed up to the glacier. The weather was superb: the air crystal clear, the sun almost hot. They were polite and considerate to each other. But they were companions, not lovers. The barrier was still there between them.

On the fourth day they picked a place to eat their lunch where a ridge of ice sheltered them from the wind. The view was magnificent. In the distance they could see both Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa. In front of them the glacier sloped down to a deep crevasse ten or twelve yards across. Tony handed his binoculars to his wife. "Take a look," he said.

She raised the glasses to her eyes, but she didn't try to focus them, and suddenly he knew that she wasn't looking at anything.

"Tony," she said, lowering the glasses, "it's not going to work, is it?"

He felt miserable. He wanted to tell her that everything was going to be all right, that the past was over and done with. He wanted to take her in his arms and kiss her. But he couldn't, and suddenly Karen dropped the glasses and covered her face with her hands. He reached for the glasses, but it was too late. The binoculars slid down the ice, and disappeared into the crevasse.

Karen looked up, stricken. "Oh Tony, how awful!" she said. "I'm terribly sorry."

"That's all right," he told her. "They can be replaced."

"But they were your father's!"

Tony's father had made a ceremony of giving the glasses to him the day he was to climb the Matterhorn for the first time.

He got up, moved carefully to the edge of the crevasse, and looked down. He couldn't see the bottom, but he saw the binoculars lying on a shelf some seventy or eighty feet down. He could hardly believe his luck; he had been sure they were gone for good. He called to Karen that he was going down after them.

"No!" she said, getting up, and all her fear of the mountains was in her voice.

"There's nothing to it," he said. "I'll use the rope—anchor it with the axe."

She came and stood beside him and looked down quickly into the greenish depth. Her face was very pale. "All right," she said. "But if you go, take me with you."

He stared at her. "You want to go down *there*?"

She said, "I want to be with you."

They stood there for perhaps ten seconds, facing each other. "All right," Tony said. "It won't be dangerous if you do what I tell you. And I'll tell you this, too—when we come back up, you won't be afraid any more."

"I don't care about that," she said. "All I care about is being with you."

Tony let her down first, slowly, carefully. Karen's fear was terrible, but something kept her from crying out—something stronger than fear.

Fifteen minutes later they were standing together on the shelf where the binoculars had landed. The sunlight, filtering through the translucent ice, had a weird, undersea quality. Tony picked up the binoculars. "Hullo," he said, "what's that?"

Something that looked like a wire was projecting from the ice-wall about twenty feet farther ahead.

He moved along the ledge, holding Karen's hand, until he came close to it. It wasn't wire. It seemed to be frozen rawhide, and it was attached to something in the ice. He could see it plainly behind the surface; it was a thin yellowish rectangle about the size of a playing-card.

Our cocktail glasses were empty again, but Tony did not notice. He was too deep in his story.

"I chipped it out and looked at it, while Karen held on to my arm. At first I thought it was bone; then I decided it was some sort of ivory. But it wasn't the substance that startled me; it was the fact that it was engraved—crudely and beautifully and painstakingly engraved on both sides with hunting scenes. There were men with spears and there were the animals they were hunting.

"I stood there, seventy feet below the surface of the Lac de Glace, and I swear to you, Jim, I felt the hair rise on the back of my neck. Because I had seen those animals before, seen them in the cave drawings of southern France. Humpbacked bison, and woolly mammoths with curling tusks, and woolly rhinoceroses—some of them extinct for thousands of years, but painted from life by neolithic man a hundred centuries ago.

"Then I felt Karen's hand tighten on mine. I glanced up, and I saw what she was looking at. They were not six feet above our heads, Jim. It was as if they were encased in transparent crystal, every detail unaltered, undecayed. The woman—she was a girl, really—was lower down, closer to us. Her face was turned away; I couldn't see it. But I could see her dark hair and the skins she was dressed in and the queer crude leggings she wore. I could even see the little pouch that she had tied to one wrist, almost like a modern handbag.

"Her arms were stretched up towards the man. He was reaching down to her; I could see his face plainly, see the look of love and anguish on it. He was lying on his stomach, one arm reaching down towards the girl. He had something in his hand

that looked like a short stick; it may turn out to be a stone axe, handle forward. We don't know yet.

"You don't have to be a mountaineer to reconstruct what happened. Perhaps a snow bridge broke; perhaps she dropped her amulet and was trying to recover it. Anyway, she got herself into a place from which she couldn't get back, and he was trying to rescue her, although he must have known that even a whisper might shake loose the tons of snow poised above them. He went down after her and he had almost reached her when the avalanche came and they died together."

Tony Ashurst stopped speaking, and although the hum of conversation went on around us undiminished, I felt as if we were completely alone.

"I knew," he said after a moment, "that we had made a sensational discovery. I knew that the earliest traces of Troy or Babylon were as nothing compared to the antiquity of these two people who had lived in the dawn of time as we know it. But somehow that knowledge didn't impress me much. I didn't think of those two as neolithic cave-dwellers miraculously preserved for thousands of years. I thought of them simply as a man and a woman who had loved each other, who had lived and died for each other. They had been dead for scores of centuries, but their love was still alive. I felt humble and ashamed. I turned to Karen and—" He broke off suddenly.

"Yes?" I asked, prompting him.

He was looking past me, and he was smiling. Karen Ashurst was coming towards us. She was wearing a simple black dress with only one ornament, a yellowish rectangle of ivory suspended around her neck from a thin gold chain. She looked more beautiful than I remembered her.

"Why, Jim," she said to me, "what a nice surprise!"

I stood up slowly. I knew, now, what Tony had been trying to tell me, what the Ashurst discovery really was.

She put her hand on her husband's shoulder. "Sorry I'm late, darling. I'm not interrupting something, am I?"

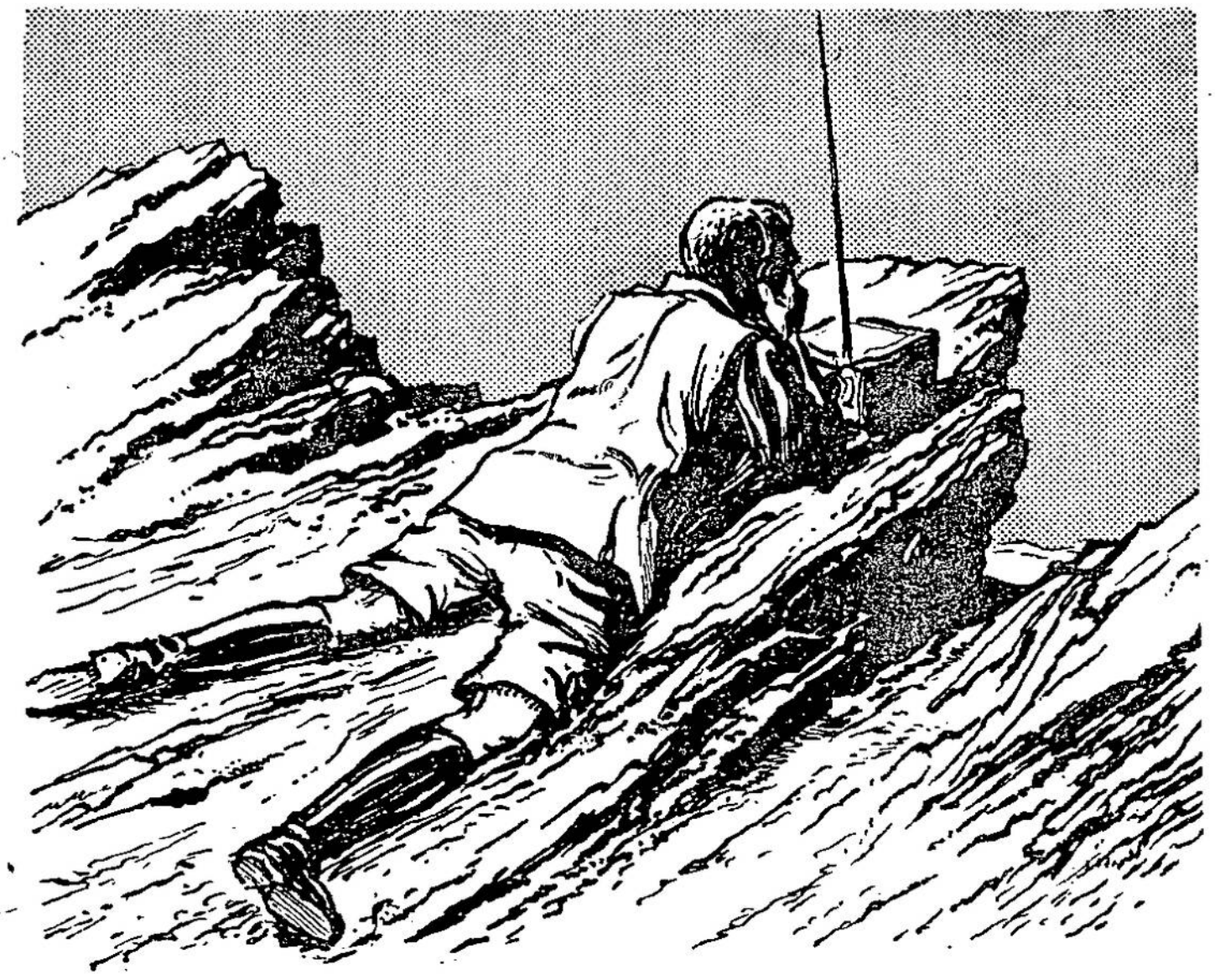
"A story," I said to her. "But you're not interrupting it. You're the happy ending."

I was glad for them; I was very glad.

★ ★ ★

COMPETITION RESULT

A prize of two guineas in the Argosy Voting Competition is awarded to Mrs. S. J. Tutty, Leicester, for her choice of stories.

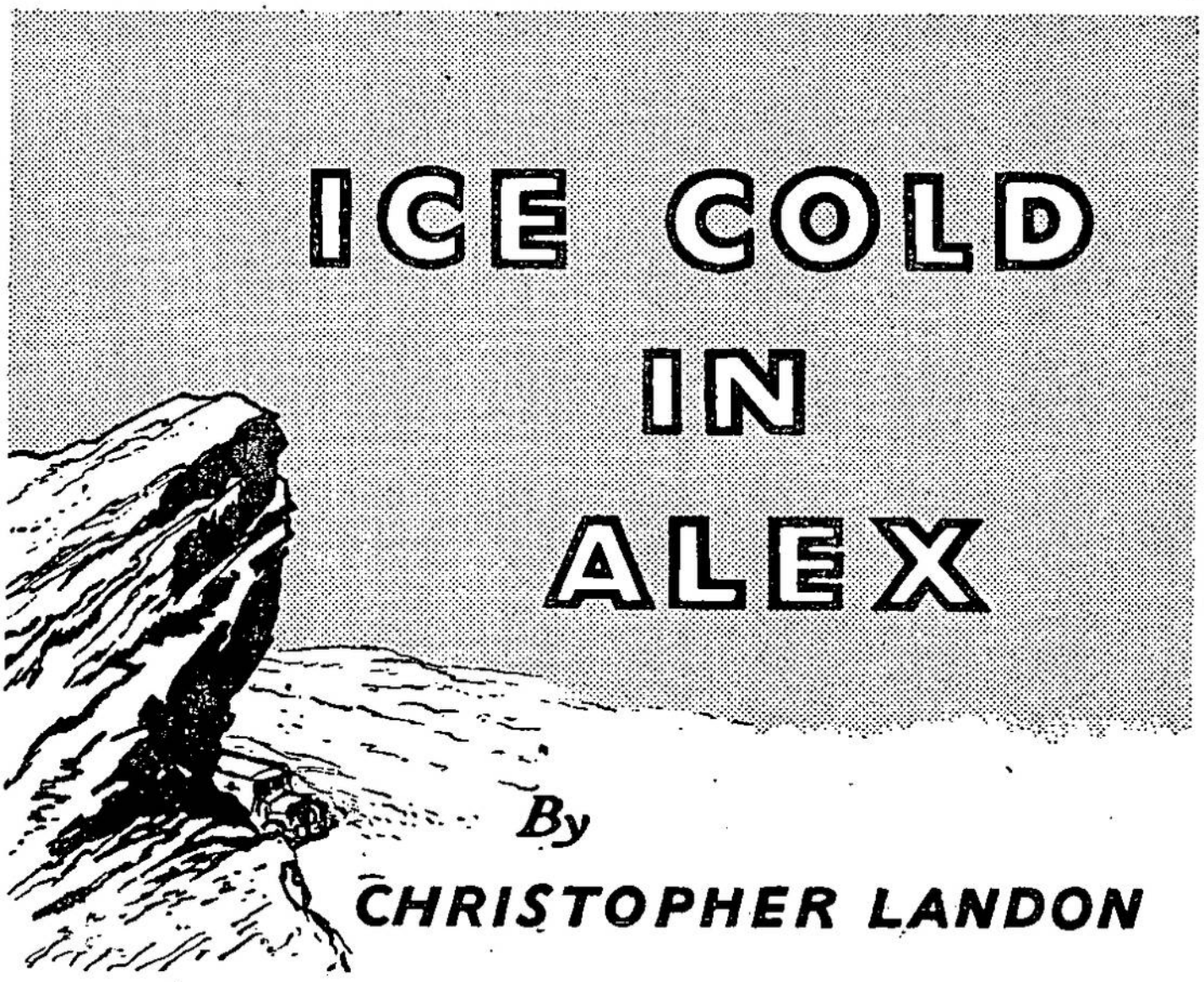


Escaping from Tobruk by the only means at hand, an ambulance, is George Anson, Captain, who has been given the responsibility of getting the two nurses, Diana Murdoch and Denise Norton, to the comparative safety of Alex.

Norton is badly shell-shocked and quite unfit to make the dangerous journey through advancing enemy lines. Fourth in the party is Anson's Mechanist Sergeant-Major, Tom Pugh, whose wife has been killed in a raid on Plymouth.

On the edge of the Tobruk perimeter, the ambulance is hailed by the huge, lone figure of Zimmerman, a South African Captain separated from his unit. He is a useful man to have with them, immensely strong, talks good German—and has some gin in his pack. Anson agrees to take him.

The only escape route now open to them crosses a minefield. Anson and Zimmerman pace ahead, sharing the risk as they lead the ambulance through. Clear at last of the hazards of the minefield, they stare appalled at the sight that opens up to them: they are running into a Lager of German tanks. Something whines directly above them, and then comes the cracking of giant whips all around their heads. They know that the fire is coming straight at them.



By

CHRISTOPHER LANDON

THE body of the ambulance jumped and shook. The door behind pushed hard against Tom's back and he rolled to one side. His heart turned over in terror as he saw the red stickiness on Diana's hands. The ambulance had been hit. Diana was crying, " Stop, stop—for pity's sake. It's Norton."

Tom Pugh bent forward and cut the ignition switch and the engine choked to nothing.

There was no more firing and in the silence as they coasted in a wide circle to face the oncoming trucks, Diana's sobbing voice went on, " Norton turned crazy. Tore off those bandages we had tied round. I tried to hold her down, but I couldn't. Then the bullets came . . . she's been hit in the stomach."

The ambulance had stopped now and the two trucks were fanning out to close in on each side. They were open and he could see the grey mushrooms of the steel helmets and the yellow dust rolling away behind. Diana said, " I had better get back—and see if there's anything . . . "

Zimmerman was on the ground, and his voice had a different tone; there was authority when he spoke. " I'll talk to them. Don't say a word—except to me." Without waiting for an answer, he shouldered the heavy pack he always carried and walked round the ambulance towards the leading truck with his hands held high above his head

Tom felt in his pocket. "Cigarette, sir?" he said to Anson.

"Thanks." Just before they lit up, a puff of hot air brought the scent of crushed camel-thorn towards them. With it—that unforgettable, bitter-sweet smell—came back to Tom all the times, the good and the bad, that they had spent together in the desert. Perhaps the Captain was thinking the same, for he said suddenly, "Sorry, Tom. I've mucked it this time."

They lit their fags and drew on them, sitting quite still, side by side, watching the distant group of figures, one towering out of the mass of khaki and grey.

Anson said suddenly, "Where's that bloody pack of his?"

"Captain Zimmerman's? He's got it on his shoulder."

"No. I mean the other one. There's some gin in it."

"It's on the floor here, sir, but don't—"

"Give it to me."

Tom handed it across, and Anson ripped the flap open and pulled a bottle of spirits upright from among the medley of socks, shaving-kit, and cigarette cartons. Then he put it down on the floor beside him. Anson's eyes drifted back to the group breaking up and coming over to them: Zimmerman, surrounded by the Afrika Korps.

"If we are going in the bag," Anson said, "I'm going to drink all his bloody gin now. If—" He stopped suddenly and gripped Tom's arm. "Do you see the way they are holding their guns? Quite loose—they've dropped the muzzles. He may have pulled it off. It's just possible."

They were close enough to see the faces now, and they were wary, not hostile.

Captain Anson's voice as he went on was different. It held a far-away, dreamlike quality.

"If he has, I'm going to tell you something right now, Tom. It will be a sort of peace offering. Do you know the next drink I'm going to have? A beer, Tom. A bloody great, tall, ice-cold glass of Rheingold in that little bar off Mahomet Ali Square in Alex. And I'll buy you one, all of you, because I'm bloody well going to get you there . . ."

Tom said, "Shouldn't one of us go in there—to help?"

"You go, Tom."

They were very close now, the Germans. Tom could hear the crunch of their boots on the gravel as he slipped through the door into the back of the ambulance.

When the noise had started—that awful whacking noise—Diana was suddenly aware that Denise Norton's body had jerked, and then gone limp against her, as a red, dripping stain spread on Norton's shirt above the waistband. The inside of the car had become a dancing pattern of sunshine from the row of jagged holes that ran up and across the side above the bunk.

After Diana had put Norton down, and run to the door and begged for them to pull up so that the slaughter might stop, it had

become the numb concentration of routine. She had torn up the dressings from the medical box, making pads from shell dressings, bandaging round from the purple bruised hole above the navel to the worse torn mess of the back. There were so few dressings available to satisfy those terrible demands.

Soon, as she worked, Diana knew it was to be no use. But it was the routine procedure, and she went on working at it methodically, not conscious of anything outside except that the ambulance had stopped.

There was no thought of capture until Tom Pugh came through the door and closed it behind him.

Norton was lying flat now, covered by the blanket, eyes open, staring at the roof. She did not make a sound. Tom did not speak either, but stood looking down at her. Recognition came back into Norton's eyes and she said suddenly, quite normally, " I want a drink."

His hand was on the screw top of one of the white water cans before Diana caught his sleeve. She turned so that her body shielded both of them from the bunk, then shook her head, and pointed to her stomach.

" I'm thirsty." The voice came clear from behind her and Diana turned to look down.

Denise Norton was crying, soundlessly, the tears just running down her cheeks.

Tom did not look again. He stared at Diana and said, " We are in the bag. They're just coming over to us. That Zimmerman —he's been over to talk to them. Captain Anson thinks Zimmerman may have worked something—but I doubt it. So I came in to say, ' Sorry '—from us all. And to see if there was anything I could do."

They were standing close to each other, and perhaps the thing that made Diana feel better than anything was the way Tom had said, " that Zimmerman." She agreed.

She said, " Don't say, ' Sorry.' You've all done so much. It makes me feel ashamed." Then she let her eyes slide down to the bunk. " But there's so little we can do for her." Diana was almost whispering. " Norton must not drink—just moisten her lips."

Tom held the water can and tipped it over the wad of bandages she had got ready. Diana knelt on the floor beside the bunk and started wiping the mouth.

She said, " Does it hurt, darling? "

And then Norton's voice came back, faint but petulant, " Who kicked me? "

They were still in the same position when the door opened quickly and a Hauptmann of the Afrika Korps came in with Zimmerman close behind.

Diana did not move. She stayed kneeling, holding Norton's hand, feeling for the feather of the pulse, keeping her eyes fixed on the badge of palm broken by the swastika in the front of that grey long-peaked cap. He did not look in the least like the blustering

bully that was always depicted to her as a Hun. He was oldish, dark, very pale; the cheeks had a sucked-in look and there were dark rings beneath his eyes.

He gave her a little bow and clicked his heels and there was nothing she could do in that position but give a silly bob in answer. He ignored Tom and turned back to Zimmerman. A stream of German passed between them. Diana thought: Perhaps it may have done the trick—I don't understand a word, but he certainly seems to speak it well.

Zimmerman's voice was quite impersonal. "The Captain says that he bitterly regrets this accident, Sister. The Afrika Korps do not shoot women. If the Red Crosses had been more easily distinguishable, if we had asked for a safe conduct, it would never have happened."

There was nothing to do except nod again. More meaningless, guttural words; then, "He wishes to know if she is badly hurt?"

What was the use of telling him she would be dead in an hour or two; that nothing could be done? There were others, the ones that had the chance to go on living, to be considered. Whether they were allowed to go on might depend on her answer.

"Tell him Norton has an abdominal wound—it's not too serious, but she should be taken to hospital as soon as possible."

The Hauptmann nodded, then leaned against the end of the bunk as a few more sentences passed between him and Zimmerman. Diana had found Norton's hand again, and suddenly, as they were talking, the cold fingers gripped hers, unbelievably strong. She looked down at the face and the eyes were open, filled with entreaty.

"What is it?" Diana soaked the pad in water again and started to moisten the mouth.

The Hauptmann had walked past her now, still ignoring Tom, to start a perfunctory search. He opened the medical lockers and lifted one or two of the cans stacked at the back. After kneeling to peer under the other bunk, he gave her another of those funny stiff bows and walked out of the door into the front of the cab.

The gaze from those open eyes, so sunken and ringed with purple now, lifted up over her head. Diana turned to see Tom bending forward, staring.

"What is it, miss?" The soft Devon burr sounded so persuasive. Now the lips were opening and shutting slowly. She was trying to talk. Diana went on sponging, seeing in pity how the full mouth she had admired was shrinking, cracking; some flecks of lipstick still hanging loose like flaking paint.

Diana bent close and said, "I know you're thirsty—but you mustn't have a drink yet." The lips moved again, but even with her head right down there was only a faint rattling at the back of the throat. Fighting the instinct of years of training, she picked up the mug and let a trickle of water fall down into the open mouth.

And then she knew she could not stand another moment of it without a break.

" Tom—I must have some more dressings. I'll go out and see if I can scrounge any."

" I'll stay here, then. Is there anything to do? "

She shook her head gently. " No. Not now. Just be near."

He got up and slipped into Diana's place. At the door, she turned to see him kneeling as she had done, chequered in sun and shadow from the gashes in the wall of the car, one big hand engulfing the little one, the other reaching up while the blunt fingers stroked up and down the forearm.

Her eyes were blinded by sudden hot tears as she went out into the still sunshine of the cab.

Diana brushed her sleeve across her eyes, and jumped down on the sand beside Anson and Zimmerman, who were leaning against the side of the car, smoking.

The Hauptmann had disappeared, but they were surrounded by a ring of the Afrika Korps, khaki and grey, with their automatic weapons crooked loosely under their arms. She saw a ripple of interest pass round the circle and wondered how long it was since they had seen a woman; it would be something to talk about in the canteen, something to write home about, if they were allowed to.

There was no enmity in their look, only a sullen curiosity; she returned it in the same spirit, wondering that they looked so young, so tired, and why hadn't someone done something about those dreadful desert sores. Then, deliberately, she turned her back and took a cigarette from the packet held out by Zimmerman.

Anson said, " I think Zimmerman has fixed it." He spoke very softly. " The Hauptmann has gone back to his truck to radio for permission for a safe conduct."

" What did you say, Captain Zimmerman? "

" The truth, dear lady, except that I implied the Captain and the Sergeant-Major were—Medical Officers."

She did not speak again but stared past his head at the slanting line of holes that ran across the canvas and the red and white paint. Which one of them was Norton's? Probably the third along. They didn't look so spectacular from the outside.

Diana forced her thoughts back to the present. " Captain Zimmerman, I must have some more dressings. Do you think you can do anything? "

" I'll try, Sister." He moved past her and walked over to the nearest Feldwebel.

Anson looked round at her and said, " How is Norton? " hopefully, but Diana shook her head.

Zimmerman and the Feldwebel had gone over to the remaining truck and presently he came back with a square grey package.

" That's all they can manage," he said.

The other truck was bumping towards them from the direction of the tank Lager, and because she could not bear to hear the verdict out there, she took the package and said, " I'd better get in," and climbed back to the inside of the car

Tom was in the same position as she had left him: kneeling, holding the hand, but he was no longer stroking the arm. There was trouble in his eyes as he said, " She tried to get up—and she said something. But she hasn't moved since."

The sun was still low enough to throw a speckled pattern from the ragged holes onto the floor. There was plenty of light to make the quick examination, even down to the formality of holding the mirror from her bag before the lips. There was nothing.

" She's dead, Tom."

Quickly she got a hypodermic from the haversack and laid it on the blanket, then folded the loose arm underneath and closed the eyes. She turned and gripped Tom fiercely by the arm. " But to anyone else—until we know what's going to happen—she's asleep. I've given her an injection."

" If you want it that way."

There were voices outside and then Diana said suddenly, " What did Norton say? "

" I couldn't really hear. It was only one word. It sounded like ' Nasty.' "

" Poor kid," she said. " But I don't think there was any pain."

There was a soft tap on the door this time and then the Hauptmann came in again, followed by Zimmerman. The South African said, " The Captain has orders to escort us to a point south of German operations. They are taking Captain Anson with them in the truck to ensure we follow. You are to drive the ambulance, Sergeant-Major. They would like to move as soon as the Sister is ready."

She said, " Now, if you like," and the Hauptmann looked down at the bunk, his eyes expressionless, before he turned to Zimmerman and spoke softly.

" He wants to know how she is."

" Asleep. I gave her an injection."

Diana's voice seemed to come quite naturally, and the German nodded and went out of the car.

When they had started she did the few things that had to be done and then sat on the opposite bunk, watching the pattern of light from the bullet-holes dancing on the floor as the car swayed. She bent down and pulled the blanket up over the face opposite before she remembered that the German might come in again. So she folded it back as before and then went out to sit in the cab with the others.

They were almost at the far cliff that they had seen for a moment when they had first come over the escarpment. There were no tanks near them now, nor any transport that she could see except the one grey truck ahead of them, a cloud of dust trailing away sideways from behind it. She could just make out Anson's head, sandwiched between two grey caps in the back. In their own cab, Zimmerman was lounging in the passenger seat, the pack balanced on his knees; Tom, upright, hands loose but sure on the wheel, driving.

She shut the door and sat down with her back against it, feet stretched out straight in front of her across the floor. She shook her head, without speaking, at the cigarette offered by Zimmerman, then turned to watch Tom.

Though she did not drive, she knew in a moment that she was being driven by an expert. It was difficult to know how she knew, except that there were not any bumps. Everything was anticipated: a turn of the wheel and the hole they would have jolted over passed harmlessly just to the side of their track; if there was a gully, he sensed it yards ahead. There would be a check on the brakes, a loosening of them at the critical moment to let her roll over easy, then the quiet pick-up in a lower gear. There was never a fault. And he's had six hours at it already, she thought.

Now the truck ahead had reached the foot of the cliff and was nosing along it to the east. Presently it turned sharp right between the boulders and up the thin crack of a wadi.

They followed in and at once the going was rougher. She said, "Take it slow, Tom, just as you would if—" She stopped, remembering that Zimmerman did not know.

She turned to where he sat, still staring straight ahead, with that heavy pack on his knees. She wondered what was in it.

She said, "Sister Norton is dead. I didn't say anything, because I thought it might prejudice—"

He didn't answer, but nodded, not looking at her, pulling at his bottom lip. The car crept on up the wadi behind the truck, the noise of the two engines echoing back from the steep rocky walls. Ahead now was the straight line of blue sky where they would gain the next level of plain. The Germans would be leaving soon, and there was something else to say before they did and Anson came back to them. And because she knew there was no time, she said it badly.

"Captain Zimmerman, I want to ask you a favour. Captain Anson had been through a pretty bad time, before you met us. He—was drinking, quite a lot. He's probably screaming for one now. But we all depend on him, absolutely, for navigation. So please keep that gin of yours out of sight."

He was silent for a moment. "What do I do—if he asks me for one?" he said at last.

She searched the clipped English for sarcasm—and decided there was none; but before she could answer, Tom's voice cut in fiercely, "He won't—he'd rather die than do that. But help him. Don't let him see it, or offer him one."

"I'll do my best," said Zimmerman.

They were at the head of the wadi now, coming out on another flat brown plain, with the same kind of low cliff far to the south of them. A hundred yards in front, the grey truck had stopped and the Hauptmann and Anson were standing beside it, waiting.

They pulled alongside and then Zimmerman jumped down and went over. Tom and Diana sat watching the group while Zimmerman and the Hauptmann talked.

Tom broke their silence suddenly. " After we left that water-point—where we picked up Captain Zimmerman—did we pass anything on the road? "

" I don't know, Tom. I was in the back."

" Of course you were—I must ask the Captain."

" Why? "

He did not answer and she saw the three men were walking back towards them.

Zimmerman looked at the Hauptmann, standing a little apart, then said, " We are now well south of their operational axis—at least for the first part of their attack. The Hauptmann is leaving us here, but advises us to go farther south, in case of a chance meeting with one of their patrols. He is sorry he cannot help us with petrol or water, but they are short themselves."

He stopped for a moment and stared straight at Diana. " And he asks how the Sister is."

" Still asleep," she said.

Zimmerman turned to the Hauptmann and there was one last exchange of words; there was a quick jerk of his head and then Anson and the South African came over to the ambulance and climbed on board.

Close to them, the German stood stiffly against the background of his truck and the faces of the troops in it, all heads turned, staring curiously. He looked all round—at the dull brown and olive of the shimmering plain, the full blue bowl of the sky, the emptiness of both. When he looked back at the ambulance, there was a flicker of expression on his face, and somehow Diana knew exactly what he was thinking. That it was one of the times when it didn't much matter whether you had the red desert rat or the broken palm painted on the front of your truck, because ahead of you were hundreds of miles of loneliness and soft sand and rock; the doubt of thirst, the danger of error in navigation, or the chance of a stray mine.

He drew himself up and gave a funny little military salute. As they passed by and he slid back out of their vision, he shouted something.

The ambulance gathered speed and there was only the open desert in front of them now, and silence among them for a few minutes. Then Anson said, " What did he say, Zimmerman? " and the South African, looking straight ahead, answered, " Good luck," and after that, no one spoke for a long time.

It was very crowded with four in the front and she thought that it might be a good idea for someone to go in the back and have a rest. There was no question of who it should be, for at close quarters Anson looked pitiable. The face was shiny and white and the sweat showed in little beads through the stubble of his chin. She had never seen anything so exhausted as those red, ringed eyes.

She said, " Don't you think it would be a good idea to take turns to lie down for a spell? Why don't you start, Captain Anson? "

She saw the gratitude in his eyes, and then he said, " But I'll disturb her," and she remembered that he was the only one that did not know, and had to tell him that Norton was dead.

He looked older, far more tired, when she had done, and for a moment she was sorry she had ever thought of the idea. But Tom's voice came from the other side, " Yes, you go on, sir." There was distaste in Anson's face even then, so she said, " I'll go first—and get things ready." As she went through the door, she heard him say, " All right. Another twenty miles on this bearing—and then stop for a brew-up."

There was only time to pull the blanket over the still, white face and unstack those on the other bunk before he stumbled in after her. He almost fell across it and she had knelt and taken off his desert boots and swung his legs up before she realized that he was already asleep. She pulled a blanket over him and stood for a moment looking down, smoothing the dark hair away from the temples, thinking of all the lost and lonely little boys she had ever seen. Then, softly, she closed the door, on the living and the dead, and went out to the cab.

There was more room now. They sat in the same order, silent except for an occasional call from Zimmerman who held the compass. She moistened her mouth from the water can and passed the mug in turn to the others. The tiredness was coming back, heavier, more urgent. There was no sound but the hum of the engine and steady hiss of the tyres against the gravel: soothing.

The ambulance went on, a minute dot in the emptiness of the desert. That far low cliff seemed to hang at the same distance on the horizon. As the sun climbed higher, the mirage grew and closed in on them. Sometimes they were running into a great shining lake that always moved on; then chains of mountains or fairy castles would sweep in majestic procession across the sky; once the gaunt timbers of a shipwreck that melted when they drew near to the bleached ribs of a long-dead camel.

Nothing was real—or lived. It was getting hot now and soon she was tired of watching it and turned to look at Tom. The greying hair, the firm jaw, the eyes shadowed by sun-glasses. She noticed the long white scar on the tan of his cheek and wondered how he had got it . . .

Tom said, " What's the reading on the bottom row of figures on the speedometer, Miss Diana? "

She leaned forward and read them back, " Five, seven, eight on the yellow one—no, that's just coming up to nine."

" Good enough." She watched his hand come forward to cut the ignition and then the car crunched on across the desert until it came to a halt. There was no particular point in the place he had chosen to stop: just a patch of pinky-brown gravel, bounded on three sides by low coarse sage-green scrub.

" That's the Captain's twenty miles," he said. " Now we brew up." He turned in the driving-seat and started rummaging behind it. " And if I know anything about Driver Grimes—he's the chap

who had our *Katy*—there'll be enough tea somewhere here to start a café. Ah—" He tugged and strained and then his hands came away with a square biscuit tin. He pulled off the top and looked inside. "Half full," he said.

When he had jumped down, he looked over at Zimmerman. "You'll find the tins under your seat, I think, sir."

Diana looked at Tom and said, "What can I do?"

"I don't want to go blundering into the back, waking the Captain yet. Do you think you could slide out another tin of water—and a jerry-can? Mind that one, it's rather heavy."

She turned with her hand on the door. "I'm pretty strong," she said.

Anson was still asleep, so dead to the world that she stopped by him for a moment to listen to his breathing. When she came out with the cans, Zimmerman was just walking round the front of the car with two cut-down petrol tins, both blackened on the outside. Tom was ripping the wood from one of the cases he had lifted out from under the dash.

"Thank you," he said. "Could you put the sand in, sir?"

"Sand?" Zimmerman stood quite still, a tin in each hand, staring at him.

"Yes." Tom had a puzzled look on his face. "Sorry—I thought all the Union troops brewed up in the same way as we do. Don't worry, I'll do it."

He took the tins, smelt them, and then turned one over on its side to scrape sand in from the ground. When he had got enough to cover the bottom for about three inches, he righted it and walked out to stand it well away from the ambulance. "Always down-wind," he said. Picking up the jerry-can and a splintered stick from the packing-case, he poured petrol on the sand, stirring it until there was a consistency of porridge. Then he moved the remaining petrol away, struck a match, and threw it at the tin.

It ignited, almost exploded, with a soft *woosshh*; the first flare had died down as he filled the other tin with water and placed it on top, leaving a little gap at one side. He handed the stick to Diana. "Now you watch it. If the flame gets low, just stir the sand, and more petrol will come up to the top."

Zimmerman was standing watching them. "Anything else I can do, Sergeant-Major?"

"Open up the biscuits, sir. And find the sugar. It should be in another biscuit tin, behind the driver's seat."

She sat by the fire, absorbed in her job, poking the sand as the flames died, watching them flicker and rise again. Once, she turned to see Tom at the front of the ambulance with the bonnet open and the tool kit strewn out beside him. The fire had just been tended, so she got up and went over.

It all looked so terribly complicated: those copper tubes and the wires and the thing that looked like a tea-pot with warts on and was, she believed vaguely, the carburettor. What surprised her most was that it was all so clean.

She leaned over, watching him. " I wish I understood it all."

His eyes stayed fixed and intent, but he smiled. " Not so difficult or different from your job. They're like humans, really. If you give them the right food and drink—a dose occasionally—and don't overwork them, they obey all the rules." He was moving the fan blades to and fro, feeling with the other hand behind it. " The only trouble—and difference—is they can't talk. So that by the time you know they have a pain, it's usually too late."

She ran her hand down the hot, smooth olive of the bonnet to where the name was painted, so beautifully, in white.

" Has *Katy* got a pain? "

" I don't think so—yet. But she's got what your docs would call a constitutional weakness—and I've got to watch it."

He was whistling through his teeth now, as he manœuvred his hand under the fan while he moved the blades left and right. Then the hand underneath, cupped, came out and there was a small drop of red water in the palm.

The whistle died suddenly as he stared at it. " You had better go and watch that fire," he said.

When the tea was made, it was hot and very sweet and the best drink she had ever had. There were only three mugs that they could find, and Tom said, " One for you—I'll share with Captain Zimmerman—and one to go in to the Captain."

She could see from his eyes that he didn't want to go in there, so she said, " Can't we leave him in peace? " But he shook his head, " No, he must eat." So she took the mug, and a cigarette that she lit and put between her lips, and climbed into the back.

Anson was deep, deep down in exhaustion still, so that she had to shake him. When he had opened his eyes and remembered her, she helped him sit up, putting an arm behind him just as if he were a patient, and gave him the tea. When he had swallowed, she took the cigarette from her mouth and passed that over as well.

" Tom's done your twenty miles," she said, " he's getting some grub now."

He had another drink from the mug and then drew hard on the fag, letting the smoke trail out through his nose. " I feel better," he said, and she thought that he looked it. He moved a little sideways and patted the empty space on the edge of the bunk. " Sit down for a minute, Sister."

She said, " Please call me Diana—the others do."

" All right, Diana. I wanted a word with you, before I talk to the others." He looked across to the other bunk and his eyes clouded; she thought how she had forgotten for the moment what was there—and felt ashamed.

He said, " First, I don't want you to think we are—unfeeling—in not doing anything about that yet; but it will be hard work, and we're all very tired. I would rather get on as far as we can today. So last thing tonight, or first thing tomorrow morning—will that be all right with you? "

" Of course."

"Then, when that's done—I want you to have the back of the car, for your own, for the rest of the trip."

She said, "I wouldn't dream of it. I want us all to share. I'll come in with any of you—all of you—except Zimmerman."

He blew out another long trail of smoke. "You don't like him?"

"No. Do you?"

He ignored the question; he said, "He's useful. He got us right out of the last mess—and I realize now, we wouldn't have had a hope on our own. And he's strong. We may need that."

Both were silent for a moment. "Anyway, Diana, I'll work out some sort of rota—two sleeping, two awake—and fix it so that you're never paired off with him."

"That's nice of you. Now come and have your grub You must be starving."

When they had cleared up and were ready to move off, Anson said, "Your turn for a kip in the back, Tom." But Tom's eyes had moved away and he said, "I'm all right, sir." There was a long silence before Zimmerman said, "If no one else wants to, I will," and he went through the door into the back, taking his two packs with him.

Anson took over the driving, Tom in the passenger-seat, Diana on the floor between them. In a moment the atmosphere had changed and she leaned back, eyes closed, listening to the flow of talk that passed over her head. She heard calculations of food and water and petrol; gathered they had plenty of all for their trip to the Wire and then back to the road. There was only one time when their voices held a serious tone, something about "if that *bloody pump holds . . .*"

Tom said suddenly, "I meant to ask you, Mr. Anson. Do you remember that drive along the road in Tobruk—after we had picked up—" he jerked his head backwards—"him at the water-point?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Did we pass any truck—that was abandoned?"

"No, not that I remember."

"No. Nor can I—but *he* said he had run a big end there."

"It could have been farther on, you know, beyond where we turned on to the track."

"He must have had a long walk, then," said Tom.

Diana looked at Anson. "Do you mind me asking questions? There's so much I don't know—and want to. I don't want you to think of me as anything different—a woman—a liability."

Anson smiled, swerved to avoid a gully, and said, "Ask away."

"Well, when we brewed up, there was no one keeping a look-out for other vehicles. Wasn't that risky, when we're still so close?"

"We were listening all the time. It gets automatic. You can hear a truck long before you can see it in a mirage. And the next?"

"Where are we going now?"

"I was going to talk to you about that. I'm turning slowly

east—running diagonally towards the escarpment, that cliff you saw before the mirage came down. We'll skirt along the base until about six. Run into one of the wadis then—snug for the night and we can have a good rest. Then—" he hesitated—" see about Sister Norton."

His voice was very gentle as he went on: " You see, out here in the open, we can't be absolutely accurate as to position. It might be very difficult to find afterwards. A wadi on the edge of the escarpment is much easier—we can mark the edge of the cliffs above with a cairn of stones." There was silence for a moment and then he went on: " Tomorrow, head for the Wire, and when we hit it, turn north-east straight for Sidi Barrani. That's about the drill—what do you think, Tom? "

There was no answer and she turned to see that he was fast asleep, his head nodding on his chest, swaying in his seat to the movement of the ambulance. " He's asleep," she said.

" Good. But for God's sake see he doesn't fall out if I have to swerve. Hang on to his belt."

She slid a hand up between it and the top of his slacks and was comforted, strangely, by the warmth of him and the easy rise and fall of his side in the slow breathing. They went on steadily with the engine monotonous in its even beat.

The sun had fallen away behind them now and the square shadow of the ambulance was creeping farther and farther away ahead on the sand. The mirage had quite gone, there was a luminous

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purple tinge staining the brown of the sand, and on their right the cliff was close and clear, with the dark jagged cuts of the wadis showing like valleys opening out along a coastline. Nothing else but their tiny moving speck on all that broad horizon. They talked in spasms: of the Delta, of home. Tom slept on.

The shadows were long when they reached the foot of the cliff, and after they had nosed their way along it for about a mile, Anson said, " I think this will do." He swung the car in towards a narrow cleft, twisting round boulders and bumping over rock slab. Tom woke up with a start and apologized, and she was sorry to have to take her arm away from his comforting nearness.

They were cut off from the plain behind them now, going up the twisting channel of the wadi bed with the rock walls rising steeply to each side. The going became easier again, the flat bottom of hard-baked clay covered with tinder-dry camel-thorn. They went on until it widened into a sort of dell and then Anson turned the ambulance sideways and cut the engine. A deep compelling silence fell over everything.

They got down, stretching, and rubbing their eyes. Anson said, " I'll wake Zimmerman and start the brew. Tom, to save time, will you go up the side of the wadi and back to the edge of the cliff? Have a look-round, and then put up a little cairn. It needn't be big—just a marker."

She said, " I'll come with you." The climb looked steep but she was past tiredness now: light-headed, almost floating.

When they had made the slope, the top was hard and level, another flat brown plain stretching away to the southern horizon without a break. There were plenty of loose flat limestone slabs about and soon they had made a pile about four feet high on the edge of the drop to the level below. As they finished, a breath of wind came suddenly from the north, infinitely refreshing. Tom eased his back and then turned through the full circle of the compass, staring at the desert and the sky.

He said, softly, " I've lived in green hills all my life. But here —at this time—it always gets me . . ."

The ambulance was hidden by the angle of the wadi: there was nothing but the two of them standing under the wide sky that ran through every shade from pink to lilac, with the blue curtain of night sliding over from the east. The red tip of the sun was going, and the plain below, a moving, changing sea of orange and slate-blue. They were the only two people in all the world. She moved closer to him, and they stood silently together.

The petrol fire was flickering pale in the shadow of the wadi when they came back. Zimmerman was squatting in front of it, stirring. As they came closer, a delicious, unbelievable smell wafted towards them and then Anson walked round to them from the back of the ambulance. Though his voice was steady when he spoke, she saw his face was deathly pale.

He said, " Driver Grimes will either go on a charge—or get an extra week's leave—when we get together again. I've never seen

such a scrounging b——. He's got everything except the kitchen stove on this car. I found a sack of spuds and onions under the stretchers. Most of them are in that stew now." It was ordinary, but breathless, and she knew he was talking because he had to.

"Anything else happened?" she said.

As he looked at her, his face changed. "No—except I've cleared out the cans at the back and opened the doors." Then he asked, very slowly, "Do you want to scrounge a drink first?"

"A drink?"

"Yes. A drink. Zimmerman's been flashing that bloody bottle of his. I expect he would spare you a little one."

"Did he give you any?" It was Tom, the voice very low.

"Why should he—if I didn't bother to ask him?" There was a sort of smile, and the voice sounded brittle. Then he turned away. Faintly, she heard Tom's breath go out in a long hissing sigh.

When the two men had run out the stretcher and carried it over to the far side of the wadi, Anson said, "Fix the back up, will you, Tom?" and Anson and Diana were left alone together.

She said, "I'm terribly sorry."

"About what?" It was so difficult to put into the right words.

"That Captain Zimmerman upset you—"

"Upset me? Why should that fat bastard swigging gin upset me? I'm tired, that's all." Then his voice changed completely: "Sorry to have to talk about these things, but have you got her identity disks?"

"I've got one in my bag—and I put the green one round her neck. Is that right?"

"Yes." He was staring down at the long dark shape on the stretcher. "We'll postpone this till first thing tomorrow."

"Tea's up, sir." Tom's voice came from behind them.

"Tomorrow morning, then," she said, and they all walked back to the ambulance.

The stew was very good, and though they could find only one plate and two spoons, they finished it to the last drop. She sat back with the plate, watching the three of them sitting cross-legged round the tin, bending forward to fish in turn, just like those men with hammers who hit crowbars into roads. Then came tea, sharing mugs—the rest of it being poured into the big cylinder to be kept hot for the night.

After they had sipped their tea in silence for a time, Anson said, "Now, orders. It's eight o'clock, so we'll divide into two shifts. You, Tom and Diana, have a sleep from now until 12.30—then Zimmerman and I will carry on till five. That gives us four hours each. We'll be fresher to get cracking—and then on to Barrani!"

Tom said, "Do you think we'll do it in a day?"

"If all goes well, yes. We should hit that old ambulance track near Piccadilly by sundown, and it's a cake-walk to the road on that, dark or no."

Zimmerman spoke for the first time. "Wouldn't it be as well to wait for the light—and make sure who is in Barrani?"

Anson stared at him. " Do you mean Jerry? Hell, man, Barrani is halfway to the Delta."

Zimmerman shrugged. " It's your party." Then he said, " If Sister doesn't mind us coming in the back with her—why don't we rack up the top bunks, and all get a good night's rest? "

The last of the light had gone so quickly that it was impossible to see their faces now, but she knew that Tom and Anson were looking at each other. Then Anson's voice came quietly: " Someone must watch—"

Zimmerman broke the silence. He got up, swinging the bigger of his packs on his shoulder. " It's O.K. by me. See you later." He went over to the ambulance and she heard the scrape of the spade as he lifted it from the retaining straps; it showed in silhouette against the night sky as he walked off up the wadi with it tilted over his shoulder. The grate of his boots faded in the darkness.

" What on earth is he doing? " she asked.

There was a pause before Anson answered and then a hint of laughter in his voice. " Lavatory. In the desert, you never ask anyone where they are going with a spade."

" Common to both sides." It was Tom's voice, coming from the direction of the fire: she heard the rustle of scattered sand, and then the last flicker of flame died.

The silence fell on them again, heavy and foreboding. No one seemed inclined to move.

Tom was standing up; she could see the dark height of him against the sky. " Time to turn in, then."

Anson said, " Sleep well, you two." Then, petulantly, " Where the hell has Zimmerman got to? ".

The two of them groped their way to the square bulk of the ambulance looming up against the stars. Then they had climbed into the back, and she had flopped down on the bunk and pulled the blanket up over her.

In the darkness, Tom said, " Would you like a last cigarette? " and she had said, " No, but I'll have a drag at yours." They lay there, separated by the narrow gap of the alley, with the glowing tip of the cigarette passing to and fro; each time she took it, she felt the touch of his fingers. When it was smoked right down and he had said, " I'm stubbing it out now," her hand had strayed back again and found his still there.

It was nice to go to sleep like that, surrendering to the waves of tiredness she had been fighting for hours, touching him.

When Zimmerman walked off up the wadi, he had gone straight along the bed for about fifty yards and then turned sharp left to start the scramble up the steep wall. Slowly, carefully, with his desert boots making only the slightest noise with the loose stones they dislodged, he made the top in a matter of minutes.

Then he moved away from the edge, ten yards on the hard, level ground, dropped the spade, and lowered his big pack to the

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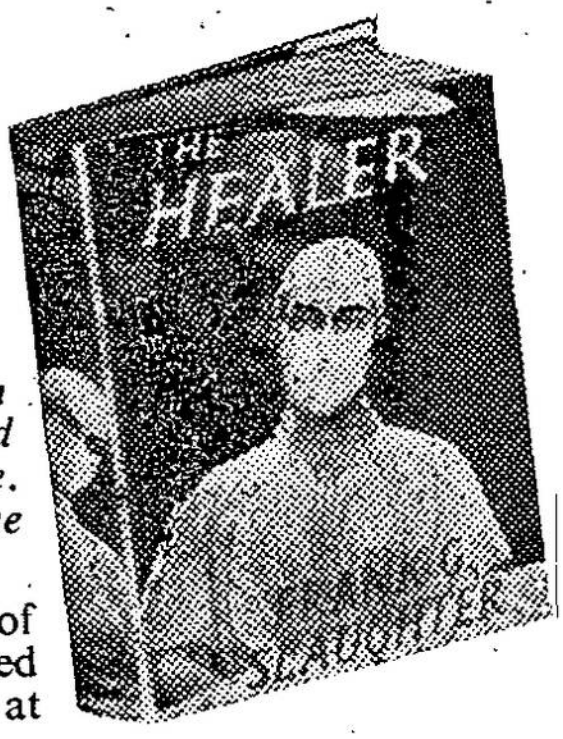

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ground. He turned it on end, looking at his watch before he started to fumble with the straps.

It was the worst, most dangerous thing of all—the part that he hated; to make it worse, in his opinion, the most futile as well.

He knew that they had to be got to the Delta—that they were too new, too advanced, to risk being dropped by parachute: he could understand the necessity of the orders, "Singly—by safe hand," but not the added danger of testing on the way. If they wanted strength and range data, they had the whole of Tripolitania to do it in; why add to the risk in ordering him to do this, when they must know he would be in the position he was in now: watched or in close contact all of the time? But those were the orders. He wondered bitterly if the same sort of thing happened on the other side.

Well, he had better do it. They had been explicit. Each night, between eight and nine—only the call sign unless there was anything vital. He looked at his watch again as the flap fell open: eleven minutes left. He had better hurry.

Now the shirt had been pulled aside from the mouth of the pack. No need to see anything. Feel was enough. He grunted as his fingers touched the little knob; twisted and pulled, and then the thin rod of the telescopic aerial jerked its way up into the dark. He felt along the panel; and there was a click and a tiny light glowed. Another inch to the left, and he found the key. It made a faint clicking noise as he started to transmit.

GMX . . . GMX . . . GMX . . . Over and over again, into the black ether, the thin crackle of his call sign went out, its faint ghost fingers reaching out over the desert, groping for his Headquarters, hoping they would detect, get the strength, and make a fix. They would know he was on the way, would not be interested in details of dead English nurses.

GMX . . . He went on steadily until the luminous hands of his watch showed nine exactly. Then he switched off, lowered the aerial, replaced the shirt, and strapped up the pack. Slinging the spade over his shoulder, he scrambled down the side of the wadi and made his way back towards the ambulance.

To Tom, it seemed only a second before he was being shaken by the shoulder and Anson was standing over him, holding a mug of tea. From the other bunk there was a faint blur of movement as the girl slipped out of her blanket. The open square of the door at the back showed only a difference in the texture of the darkness: the moon must have gone down.

They changed places in silence; there was only Anson's quiet "Call us at first light and then we'll get on with it," before the bulk of Zimmerman slid in behind them and the door of the ambulance closed. They walked round to the front of the car, drawing tight round their shoulders the blankets they had kept, and then leaned back against *Katy*'s bonnet, sipping the tea in turn, silent, looking up at the sky. The night was still, beautiful.

The strip of sky that showed between the banks of the wadi was like a glittering river with the stars so bright and close that it seemed you had only to reach up your hand to pull them down. The sides of the wadi came down dark and uneven in contrast with the pale grey of the scrub.

The girl was still looking up. She said, " I never dreamt there could be anything like that."

" No. When we get home, we'll be missing it—longing to be back here again."

" I suppose so. As now we long for those other things—that seem so remote and past."

" Just a few of them," he said. " Not many—with me."

" What do you miss most, Tom? "

He said, " Haddock," quite seriously and without hesitation, and when she had stopped laughing, went on in the same tone: " Do you know, often when I wake up out here—and think of that bully again for breakfast—my mouth starts to water, I almost sweat, when I remember a great wedge of golden haddock, properly done in milk, with a poached egg on top."

Her voice was full of laughter as she said, " But you can have the eggs."

" Eggs? Do you call those things eggs? The size of marbles and no taste at all. Do you know the official rate of exchange for them with the Bedouin? It's in General Orders—a handful of tea for each one. I call it encouraging robbery—"

The starlight was so bright now that it shone on her hair. She was quite still and he could not see any expression on her face.

" Let's sit down for a bit," Tom said.

They sat down close, their backs against the front wheel.

There was a long silence after that. He tried to ease it by pulling a couple of cigarettes from his packet, lighting them, and passing one over. She drew on it eagerly, staring out into the shadow. She said suddenly, " Norton wasn't a friend of mine. I hardly knew her until she panicked and ran away, and made us miss the convoy. I was put in charge of her for this trip. She was a silly man-mad little bitch—and useless as a nurse. But I feel worse about it than anything else that has ever happened."

" You weren't to blame. Our fault—if anyone's."

She said, " I wonder what she was trying to say to you—"

" I don't know. Nothing to me, really, I expect. She may have thought I was someone quite different." They were quiet again, each locked with their own thoughts. Then he said, " Captain Zimmerman—he shouldn't have done that."

" No. Not after we had asked him not to. But we weren't there, Tom, we don't know what happened. And—perhaps he may have taken notice already. He took the pack with him when he went off—with the spade. And I saw it slung over his shoulder when he went in to bed just now."

Tom snorted. " It isn't in there—it's in the other one."

" How do you know? "

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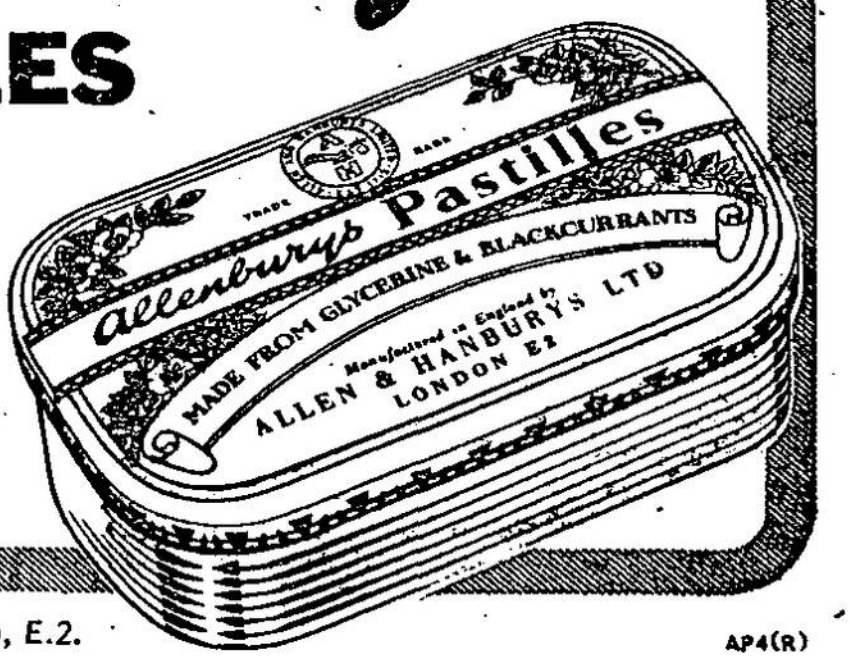

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AP4(R)

"We looked—when he was over talking to the Germans, and you were in the back—" He got up and moved back to the cab; there was a fumbling and a faint scraping. Then he came over swinging a pack by its strap. "He's not so careful about this one," he said. "It was lying on the floor."

He stood swinging it, listening. There was no sound from the back of the car. Then he said, "I'm a very careless man, Diana, clumsy. After I had to get up in the cab, when I jumped down, I tripped on Captain Zimmerman's pack and knocked it off—" He shortened his grip of the strap and brought it down hard on a rock that was by his feet; there was a faint brittle sound above the thump and then he lifted the pack again, feeling the underside carefully.

"I'm afraid I broke his bottles of gin," he said as he put it down again, "so you must remind me to apologize, first thing in the morning."

When he came back and sat down beside her, he added, almost defensively, "The Captain's got over the worst now—but perhaps it will make things easier."

She said, "He's probably got some more—in that other pack."

"Then I'll drop that too, or run over it, if I get a chance—" He stopped suddenly, jerking his head round. "Hush... Listen!"

The sound came to them, suddenly and very clear, perhaps because they were fully conscious of it for the first time. *Plop.*

A little sound, a cross between a ping and a splash. It came from directly behind them, underneath the bonnet. She started to say something, but again he said, "Hush." It came a second time after an interval of about ten seconds. *Plop.* He cursed and turned, burrowing his head and shoulders underneath the car. When he came out, he dragged a shallow tin after him.

"That bloody pump," he said. "I thought it had begun to leak at lunch-time, so I put this tin underneath tonight to check. Look, it's half full already."

"*Katy*'s constitutional weakness," she said.

"Yes—and it might be serious. It's the washer that's gone. I haven't got a replacement—and if you try to tighten this one to stop the leak, it might break up altogether."

"What would happen then, Tom?" He tried to explain a little of it, but gave up as soon as he realized she hadn't got a clue. He put the tin back and, to stop thinking of the washer that dripped behind—that could use up their water so fast that there might not be any left to drink—started talking of other things, far-away things. Quite suddenly the stars were gone and a faint luminous greyness was creeping into the dark of the night. He said, "First light," and got up stiffly.

"If I light the fire, will you watch it while I find a place to start?"

He left her crouching in front of the tin, stirring the sand; then went and got the pick and shovel from their clips, and cast round in the bed of the wadi until he found what he thought was a likely

place. He started with the pick, swinging slowly and rhythmically until he had broken the surface in a space two feet by six. As he stooped to lift the spade to clear away, he stared for a moment at the bright, clean blade. Captain Zimmerman must be very particular to have cleaned it after use in the dark last night . . . or perhaps he had not used it at all. He went on with the shovelling.

It was when he had got down about two feet that he came on trouble. The point of the pick started bouncing back with a hollow sound, the shock jarring up the handle to his hands. Rock. He tried all along the narrow trench, but it was just the same.

It was clear grey light now. He straightened as the girl came over with a mug of tea in her hand. " I've wakened the others," she said. " And broken the news of the accident to Zimmerman. They're just coming over."

" What did he say? "

" Nothing."

He stayed leaning on the pick, until they walked over. He said, " I'm terribly sorry, sir. Knocking that off the step in the night, I'm afraid I've spoilt everything."

Zimmerman shrugged. " An accident, Sergeant-Major, it can't be helped. Most of the cigarettes are all right, and my socks will dry." He looked into the trench. " How are you getting on? "

" I'm not. We'll have to start all over again. I've hit rock."

Zimmerman stripped off his bush-shirt and spat on his hands. " Give me that thing."

Tom watched him, standing in the trench: the rippling play of the muscles of that great back as he swung the pick high and brought it down with terrific force. About twice as hard as either of us could hit, he thought. Zimmerman was hitting always in the same spot and now little sparks were beginning to fly; then there was a sharp crack and the pick point went on through. He grunted as he levered up a slab. " The rest should come up easy," he said.

He went on lifting and shovelling, while Tom watched the swing of his arms, the red and green identity disks hanging against the matted black hair on the chest. He wondered if he had been wrong in all those half-formed thoughts, was ashamed of what he had done last night. There was only one thing certain: neither he nor Anson would have had the strength to break that rock.

He said, " Look—I must try and fix the pump. Will you help me, Diana, while we're waiting for them? "

" Of course. What do you want me to do? "

He spread a blanket beside the car and tipped out the entire contents of the tool-kit box on it. " Look through all those little bits—the nuts and bolts—and see if you can find a black washer, it will feel sort of soapy." He had looked earlier and knew there wasn't one.

Then he wriggled under the sump. " And pass me the tools as I want them."

He lay on his back, fumbling, listening to the shovelling noise

that had started again, delaying as long as possible to keep her on the ground beside him where she could not see. Only when the sounds from the far side of the wadi had stopped and she had reported that there was no washer there, did he wriggle out, pulling the tin after him.

" Over a pint gone," he said, " and I've tightened as much as I dare." As he straightened, to pour the water from the tin back in the radiator, he saw the two men walking towards them from the far side of the wadi, carrying a folded stretcher.

They all tried to be terribly normal while they ate: the conversation ranged over anything except the last thing that had to be done. The words got steadily more stilted, more brittle, and at last Tom could stand it no longer. He looked at Anson and said, " Shall I try and make something up, sir? "

Anson nodded, so he got up and ripped two strips of wood from the top of the case that held the tinned milk. He took a bit of the binding wire and got it red-hot in the fire and bored holes through each strip, binding them together in the form of a cross. He searched his pockets but he had only a pen and that wouldn't take on the wood. None of their pencils was indelible and they could not think how to do it until Diana said, " My lipstick's supposed to be waterproof—"

So, with that, he printed her name, her number—which Diana got from the other identity disk—and the date.

They stood two on each side while Tom pushed the wooden

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upright hard down in the sand and banked some stones up round it. And, not because he was in any way a religious man, not for the dead girl, but for the living Diana, Tom felt he must do something. Slowly, the soft Devon voice stumbled into the words, *The Lord is my shepherd.* He dried up after a few verses because no one else had joined in. Then he said, " I'm sorry—that's all I know," and they all stood silent for a few moments, looking at the ground.

When they set off again, Anson was driving, Zimmerman in the passenger seat, still hugging that pack; the other two had gone into the back of the car for a rest.

Anson felt in his pocket and pulled out the compass; he passed it over without looking round. " Keep her on 170°, Zimmerman."

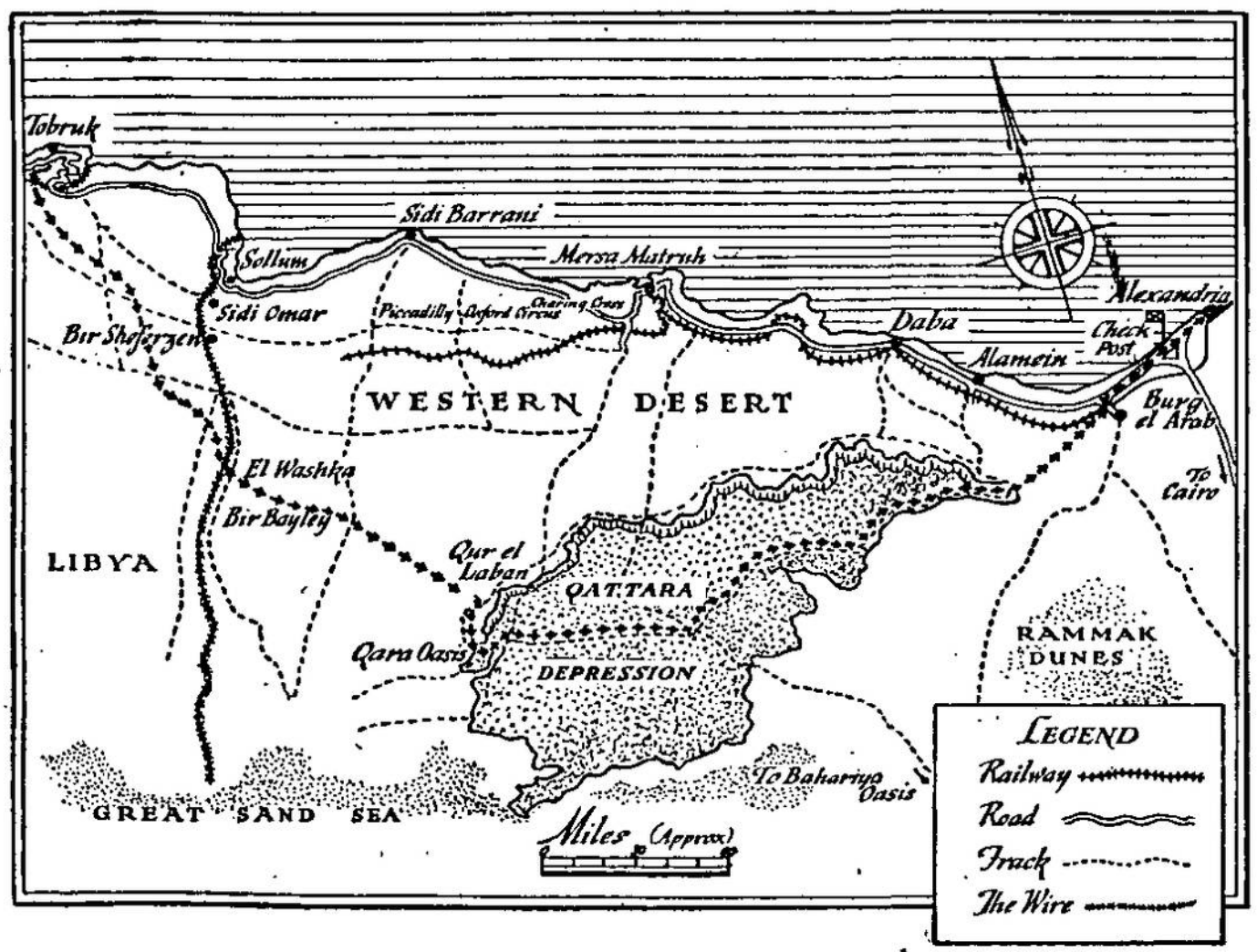
" O.K., man." Except for his clipped directions to keep on the course, they did not speak for the first half-hour. Once or twice Anson glanced at him, sitting there, hunched over the compass he had balanced on top of the pack. Then his eyes went back to the way ahead.

Zimmerman said suddenly, " What's the plan, Captain? "

" I was going to talk about that when we stop to brew up. But do you know the lie of the land this far south? "

" No. Only what I've read."

" Well, we must allow for the possibility that Jerry's through the Wire, so it won't be wise to try and make the coast road to the west. That means we'll have to keep on bearing southish, to give the coast as wide a berth as possible, until we hit the Masrab that



runs along the top of the Depression, then we can turn north up the Garawla track to the sea." There was a pause and he added, "But it means another hundred and fifty miles."

"There's plenty of petrol, isn't there?"

"Yes. That's not the trouble. It's the water pump. We lost nearly a quart of water last night, though of course we can save that. But we can't when we're running. There's a carbon washer —it's wearing. If you tighten too much, it will crumble altogether —and then we're done. I don't think you could disconnect the pump anyway—and if you did, she'd boil in this heat."

"So?"

"So there will be an increasing drain on the water—and always the chance of a bloody long walk." Silence again: floating on the bottom of the brown sea, with the gravel rushing under them in its quiet sound.

Anson said, "I was attached to your Div for a bit."

"When?" There was a hint of sharpness in the question.

"Oh—let me see—about nine months ago. When they first came up. I was with Supply Services."

"I wasn't up with them then. I only came up from the Union last January."

Nothing could have been more negative. He said, "But you must have heard of some of them—old Kramer, the Colonel—he was a character."

"Kramer—yes. I did meet him once. I can remember him."

"Do you remember . . .?" Anson embarked on one of many tales. While he was talking, his voice seemed to come from outside him, from someone else. He could even listen to it while he was thinking: Kramer, you have met him, the Colonel of Supply Services. There's only been one head of Supply Services, and his name was not Kramer. It was Maggs, Eugene Maggs . . .

Suddenly, Zimmerman was pointing through the screen. "What's that?"

Something was showing on the edge of the bowl ahead of them. At first it looked like a row of thin black columns, then the mirage cleared and it was a low rusting barbed-wire fence that stretched across their path from horizon to horizon.

"The Wire," he shouted and, leaning back, pushed open the door, "Wake up, Tom, it's the Wire."

Tom came out from the back, rubbing his eyes. "That's pretty good, Captain Anson. Where are we on it?"

"Unless we're a lot adrift—about two miles north of El Washka, where there are those two palms and a gap. I'm going to turn south and find it. We should hit Bir Bayley, we'll brew up there, and see if the well is worth digging out. We can't drink it, but it will help for the radiator."

It was four miles to the south of them in fact, but still he was very pleased. They ran that distance down the edge of the fifteen-foot-thick fence, and stopped to brew up. For more than an hour, Tom and Captain Zimmerman dug down the best part of fifteen

feet but the sand was scarcely damp. It was brackish and salt as hell when Anson put it to his lips. No use.

So they began to clear up, and Anson said, "The water, Tom. Check every drop, and then we'll talk this out." He sat on the step with his map-board on his knee, with the others beside him, waiting for Tom to come back. Then he cleared his throat. "Well, how much?"

"Ten full tins—and a drain in the one we're using."

"That's twenty gallons. And how fast is that thing leaking?"

Tom shrugged. "It's difficult to say. Perhaps a gallon to every four hours' running. We can't save that."

"Say, three gallons a day—at the top. We've been using four for cooking and other things. So there's three days' water."

"Can't you tighten it up at all?" It was Zimmerman.

"No. Tom tells me another quarter turn and the washer will break. All he can do is to keep it packed with grease—and we haven't much of that. Three days . . ." Anson repeated, "and there are two, no—three alternatives.

"The first—to disregard the risk of running into Jerry and go straight from here to Matruh. That's not more than 150 miles. Easy. But we would be converging on the coast all the time, and it would be awkward if Jerry is well ahead of us. The second way is to stick to my original plan and skirt round the longer, safer camel road at the top of the Depression and then up the Garawla track. 270 miles—all of three days and about our limit." He was silent for a moment. "Of course—there is one other. Go south from here to Siwa or Qara Oasis, where we know there's water. Fill right up and then go straight across the Depression itself."

To Diana it seemed as straightforward, but quite as incomprehensible as the other plans. But there must be something different about it, for she saw Tom's face: it was as if his C.O. had made rather an improper suggestion.

"You wouldn't do that, sir."

"Why not? I've done it before. I know the distance is greater, but we would be filled up, and certain not to meet anyone."

Tom said, "I didn't mean that. The other time—it was training. You had light stuff—and there were planes to keep a check on you. But alone—and in this crate, no."

It was all completely beyond Diana, so she said, "What is this Depression?"

Anson got down from the driving-seat and propped the map-board up against the bonnet. "Come here, Diana—and you, Zimmerman. I'll try and show you." She peered over his shoulder while his finger moved over the face of the map.

"From here, east, the desert proper funnels down until it's only about forty miles wide at a place called Alamein. The sea is the boundary to the north and this Depression comes up to meet it from the south. It's a salt marsh—and to understand it, you must try to think of the lie of the land sideways. From the sea, the desert rises up in shelves—escarpments—just like those

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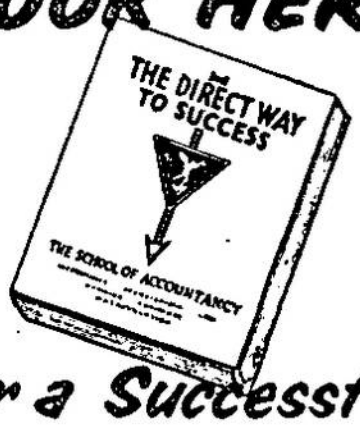

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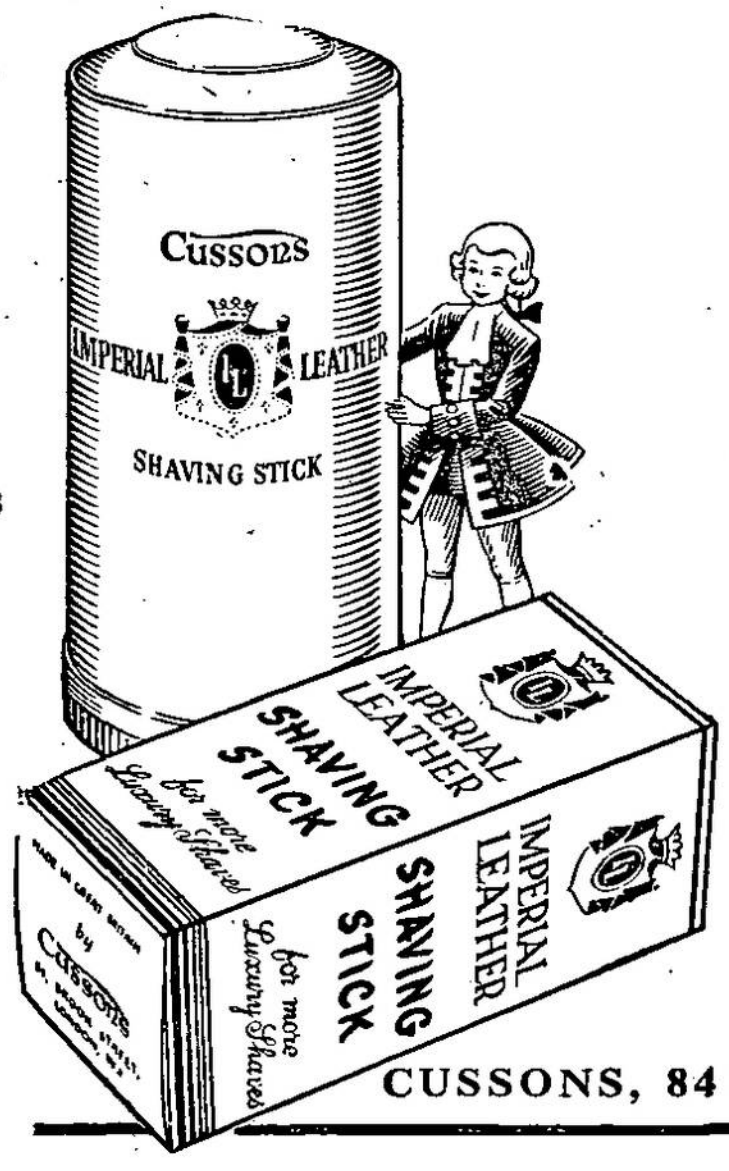

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yesterday. The ground rises gradually between them, so that here we are at about six hundred feet. It goes on south of us to eight hundred or so, then drops a thousand in one big cliff to the Depression—which is below sea level. There is a track across, but the going is—very bad. That's what Tom meant."

She was watching his pointing finger. It rested now on a great area that was coloured grey-green; a faint dotted line wandered along its length, almost uncertainly. There were words printed in places beside it, " Bad going," " Soft sand." In one place, just, " ??? "

Anson said, " I think I could make it." Then he looked round. " Well, there you are. Direct to Matruh, or the Garawla track, or across the Depression." No one said anything, so he looked questioningly at Tom.

" The Garawla track, sir," Tom said, speaking for them all. " Somehow I'll make that pump last."

" All right, the Garawla track, then. Tom, will you take over? Sixty miles on 115°. Then call me. I'm tired." He went into the back of the car and Zimmerman, with his pack, followed him. When Tom had emptied the tin back into the radiator and poured in a good deal of one of the cans beside, they set off into the emptiness ahead; the only living moving object in a thousand square miles. But they had made their decision.

For four miles, to be exact 3.8, they kept on a set course. Then, on a bit of level going, suddenly the left rear spring went.

There was a sharp crack and the car lurched and seemed to sag backwards and sideways. Tom swore horribly and braked gently to a halt. As they jumped down, the other two piled out of the back.

Diana could only stand and watch, feeling useless. But there was one thing that she noticed at once and it did not seem strange to her: without a word being spoken, Tom had taken over control. He had gone straight to the back, squatting, sucking his teeth as he looked at the bright, broken end of the main leaf of the spring where it jutted out beyond the shackle. Then he crawled underneath and came out dusting his hands and looking quite cheerful.

" Not too bad. We can fix it. Get a lot of flat stones." Then he looked at her as if she was an orderly. " You, Diana—put that tin under the radiator just as you saw me do last night. And make sure the drips are falling in it." Meekly she went, and when she had finished crawling under the sump and gone back to the others, the wheel was off already and the jack supporting the chassis. While Anson was going out in the surrounding desert and bringing in flat slabs of rock, Zimmerman was underneath the car making a pile beside the jack.

Tom looked up from his work on the axle, pausing to wipe his hands and smile at her.

" Best know what we're doing, Diana. With only one jack, it's got to be done in two stages. We put her up—make a pile of stones under the chassis, then let her down on that—so that the jack is free to work the spring in."

"Work the spring—?"

"You've seen the spare ones tied on the front. When there's no load on the springs, there's too much camber—bend—to let them reach the shackles—the bolts that hold it to the car. So we fasten the front end, then press the spring up against the weight until it is flat enough to reach the back. Then we bolt up, put the wheel on, kick away the stones, and let the whole lot down."

"It all sounds as if it will take a long time."

"All of two hours," he said, "but there's nothing we can do about it." He went on with the task of unbolting the broken spring from the axle.

She wandered round, watching them; Anson was underneath with Zimmerman now, helping to pack the stones. At last he said, "That seems firm enough. Let her down gently, Tom."

She watched him leave his work on the spring and go round and twist the lever of the jack; slowly, the body of the ambulance sank down onto the stones, there was a grating noise, a gentle rock, and then no movement.

Tom slid the jack clear.

Anson was coming round from the front with the new spring, Tom was lifting the old one clear, Zimmerman, apparently resting, still underneath the back, when there was a brittle cracking and puffs of dust jetted out from underneath the chassis and the ambulance started to slide down while the stones slipped out of the pile with a rattle.

Tom shouted, "Christ! she's going. Captain Zimmerman, try—try to hold her—" While Tom was shouting, he moved; and she had never seen anyone move so fast in her life. Tom dived down, the jack in one hand, pumping at the lever with the other. The pile of stones disintegrated rapidly.

There was no chance in that split second for the jack to be dragged back into position; no chance of Anson being able to get under there quickly enough to save the wrecking of the ambulance. Their only hope was in Zimmerman, on hands and knees under the chassis. Grunting, joints cracking, he struggled to hold the heavy body of the ambulance on his own.

Zimmerman locked his arms and his legs, and heaved up, taking the intolerable strain while the cross-members of the chassis ground down into his spine; terrible tearing moments, with the twisting pain in his guts and the thudding red haze before his eyes. He had taken it, and there had been no thought of his mission, of the war, as he had done so. Only of that long walk there would be for all of them if he failed, the unending waste of sand that would divide them from other humans, the thirst, the sunstroke.

There was only one enemy in those seconds. The desert.

Then relief came and they pulled him out. He sat on the sand, unable to get up, drained of everything except that awful pain in his guts. When he could see properly, he looked up and they were

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grouped round him, staring down in a peculiar way. The girl said, " Are you all right, Captain Zimmerman? " and he couldn't answer for a moment and when his voice did come it did not sound like his own. " I've hurt my back—I think I'll lie down."

Diana fetched a blanket and spread it out; then she helped him move onto it. " My pack," he said, " it's still under the car—could you get it? "

She came back at once, holding it by the strap, and he knew there had been no time to open it. She put it down beside him. " Would you like a drink? " She went to the front of the car and fumbled in her haversack; she came back with a flask he had not seen before and held his head while he tilted it back. It was Scotch whisky and made him feel better. She knelt beside him. " Where does it hurt? "

Something in her attitude irritated. " Everywhere. I think I've twisted my guts. But if I've ruptured something—which is what you think—there's nothing to be done about it, is there? "

" Nothing," she said.

" Then give me a cigarette—and go and help the others. We don't want to be here for ever."

When she had gone, he lay quite still, flat on his back, watching the thin spiral of smoke twisting up into the hot air, regretting everything.

It took them three hours to complete the job. They worked slowly with a double check on each stage, and this time there were no accidents. Diana's part was the selection of the smoothest, flattest stones, and she thought afterwards that she must have walked at least five miles in her circling of the ambulance looking for them. They made her loosen her hair to hang over her shoulders as protection against the sun. Secretly, she thought it silly, for it was not so hot now, a deathly stillness coming with the cool.

When they had finished, they let *Katy* off the jack and stowed away the tools. They got Zimmerman into the back without much difficulty: it was just as if he was rather stiff and tired. They brewed up and took his share into the back of the car, and he seemed grateful but uncommunicative. The sun vanished soon after they had finished clearing up: suddenly, twisting the purple shadows in a moment to blackness.

Anson looked at her. " Tired, Diana? "

" No, not particularly."

" Well, take the first stretch with me and let Tom have a spell. We'll be off with the moon and drive while it lasts. Tom, I'll call you at midnight."

After Tom had gone into the back and as they waited for the moon to rise, Anson said, " Sit down, or walk about? "

" Walk about." They wrapped the spare blankets round their shoulders and started a slow circling of the black square of the ambulance. They were out of earshot, but she spoke very softly. " I picked up Zimmerman's big haversack this afternoon," she said.

" So what? "

" It was heavy, and it didn't feel like bottles. I thought you ought to know."

He stopped in his tracks and swung round towards her. " Do you know he saved us all—completely—this afternoon? If she'd come down on the axle, we'd have been finished—had to walk a hundred miles—probably straight back into Jerry hands."

" That's not the point," she said.

" It *is* the point, Diana. Look, I think I know what he's got in there—" he peered at his watch—" and if something happens soon, I'll have proved it."

" If what happens? "

" Regardless of his twisted guts, or his stiffness, Captain Zimmerman will continue his regular habits before nine."

It was ten minutes to the hour before they heard the sounds coming from the cab; when they had circled to that side, it was Zimmerman, standing on the ground, unclipping the spade. They moved over to him. " Are you all right, Zimmerman? "

He turned, leaning heavily on the spade. " Yes. I won't be long."

" Don't be. The moon will be up any moment, and I want to move off at once."

" All right." He turned away and shuffled off into the darkness.

She waited for Anson to speak, but he just resumed his leisurely pacing. She said, aghast, " But aren't you . . . ? "

" *No.*" It was fierce. " Whatever's wrong, he can't be doing any harm *yet*. And he's saved us twice already."

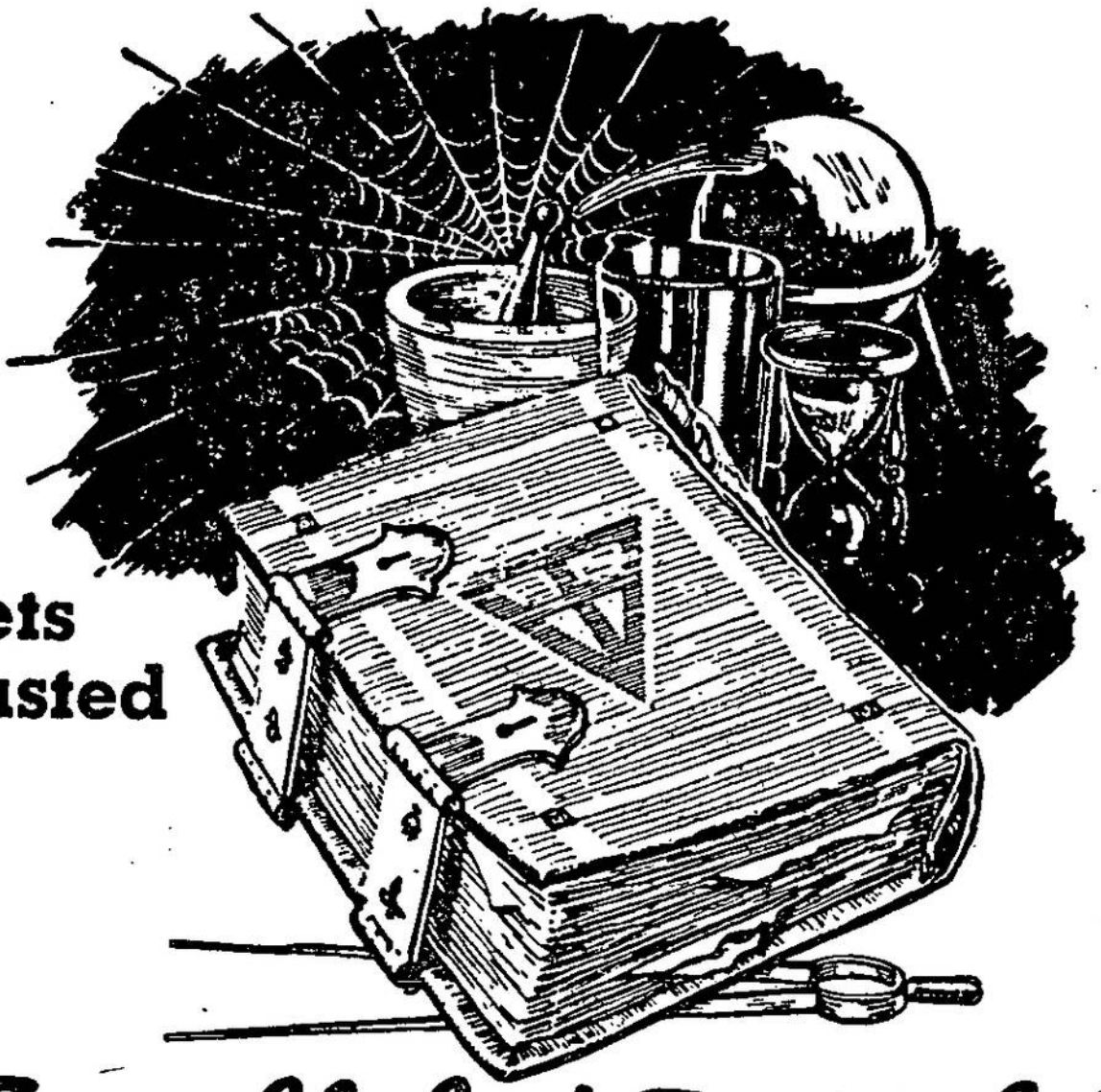
He wasn't long. When he had come back out of the gloom in that slow shuffling gait, the tip of the moon was just beginning to show over the hills to the south. " He just made it," said Anson. " Now, let's get moving."

He climbed into the driving-seat and gave her the compass and showed her how to use it. There was deep satisfaction in being for once rather important, and she held the heavy roundness of it clasped tight on her knees, peering at the swing of the needle's luminous point against the pre-set mark of 95°, giving him the direction when he veered off course. As she got more used to it, she could relax and they talked in spasms.

" This Depression," she said. " What's it like? Why was Tom so dead against crossing it this afternoon? "

" It's a salt marsh—a bog, if you like. It's shaped rather like a pear, stalk up and tilted over to the right. It's two hundred miles from end to end and a hundred across the broadest part. It's all below sea level and water seeps through the deep rock strata of the desert and comes up from underneath it. But it never rains, so the sun dries out the top in a sort of crust, thickest in the summer, of course. But the whole thing is floating, really, and if you break through the crust, you've had it."

He was silent for a moment. " There's one track down the middle—I suppose the ground may be a foot higher than all the rest and dries out quicker and thicker. It's marked " Safe for Vehicles," but it's difficult to follow. If you don't—"



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She said, " That's why Tom didn't fancy crossing it? "

" Yes. And he's right. This ambulance is far heavier than the trucks we had."

" Could we go round to the south of it? "

" No. The Great Sand Sea is there."

He pulled up, and they got down on the sand. Taking out his cigarettes, he lit two carefully, turning towards the ambulance to shield the flare of the match with his body. " I'll wake Tom before long."

She said, " You're very careful about lights."

" Better to be safe than sorry. They might try a night dash for Siwa—and you can see a match the hell of a distance."

" They . . ." Her thoughts turned abruptly to other things. " Zimmerman," she said, " he—"

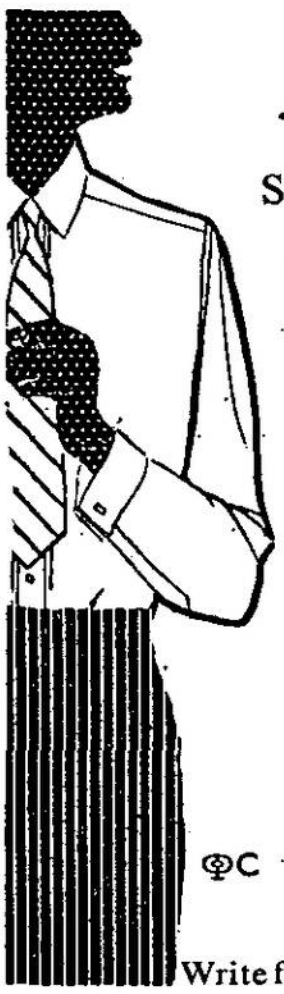
There was a bumping and a scuffling behind them and Tom Pugh came out of the cab to jump down on the sand.

" I woke up, sir." The voice was reproachful. " It's past your time."

" Sorry, Tom. We were nattering. How's Zimmerman? "

" Asleep and snoring. I didn't like to wake him."

" Then we had better get this Zimmerman business sorted out—once and for all." He came and squatted close to them. " Both of you, at one time or another, have come to me, quite rightly, about Captain Zimmerman. I wouldn't listen to you. I know all you can tell me about him. But whatever it is that's wrong,



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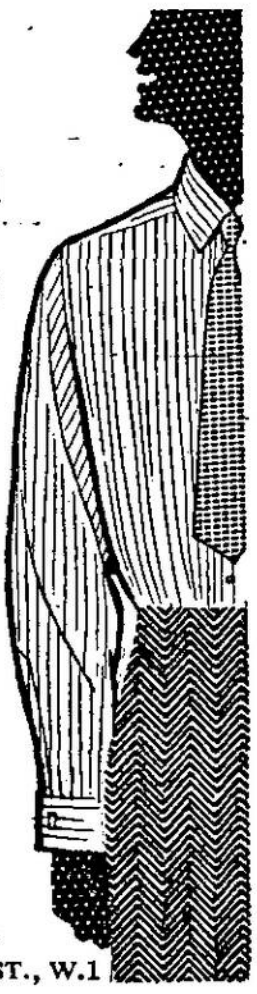


he can't do any harm—now. The important thing is that he shouldn't know your suspicions. We must have his help. We need him. So, ignore it; try not to think about it. But if you see anything new, just let me know on the quiet."

Then he said, "That's an order. Understand?" Anson swung himself up on the step again and melted into the shadow of the cab. The door to the back of the car shut with a click.

They sat on under the silent, circling stars; they talked of many little things but afterwards she could not remember any of them. The only jarring note was the noise of the pump dripping into the tin behind them. It was faster, and she hoped that Tom had not noticed.

But he had, for with the first hint of the greyness of the dawn he got stiffly to his feet. "I'm going to have a last crack at tightening that so-and-so. You get the fire going, Diana."

She made the tea, watching from time to time the serious, absorbed face that peered into the open bonnet; the sun was up, the blood-red ball had changed to yellow glare, and Diana was aware of the first breath of heat. The two from the back came out and took their silent, preoccupied meal. Tom would not leave his work, and Anson had joined him at the bonnet when she took over the last of the tea.

"Did you hear that, just now?" she said. "It sounded like a plane . . . far away."

Anson swung round to stare at her. "Nonsense. Not this far south."

But Tom said, suddenly, "Listen."

It was a new sound, getting louder every second, a strange drone coming from high up and the north-east.

They stayed frozen, looking at each other, not the sky, while the noise got louder and louder. Then, with the tight roar of a power dive, the plane came straight down at them from out of the sun.

★ ***The Third (and last) Part of Ice Cold in Alex, by Christopher Landon, appears in next month's Argosy on sale November 9.***

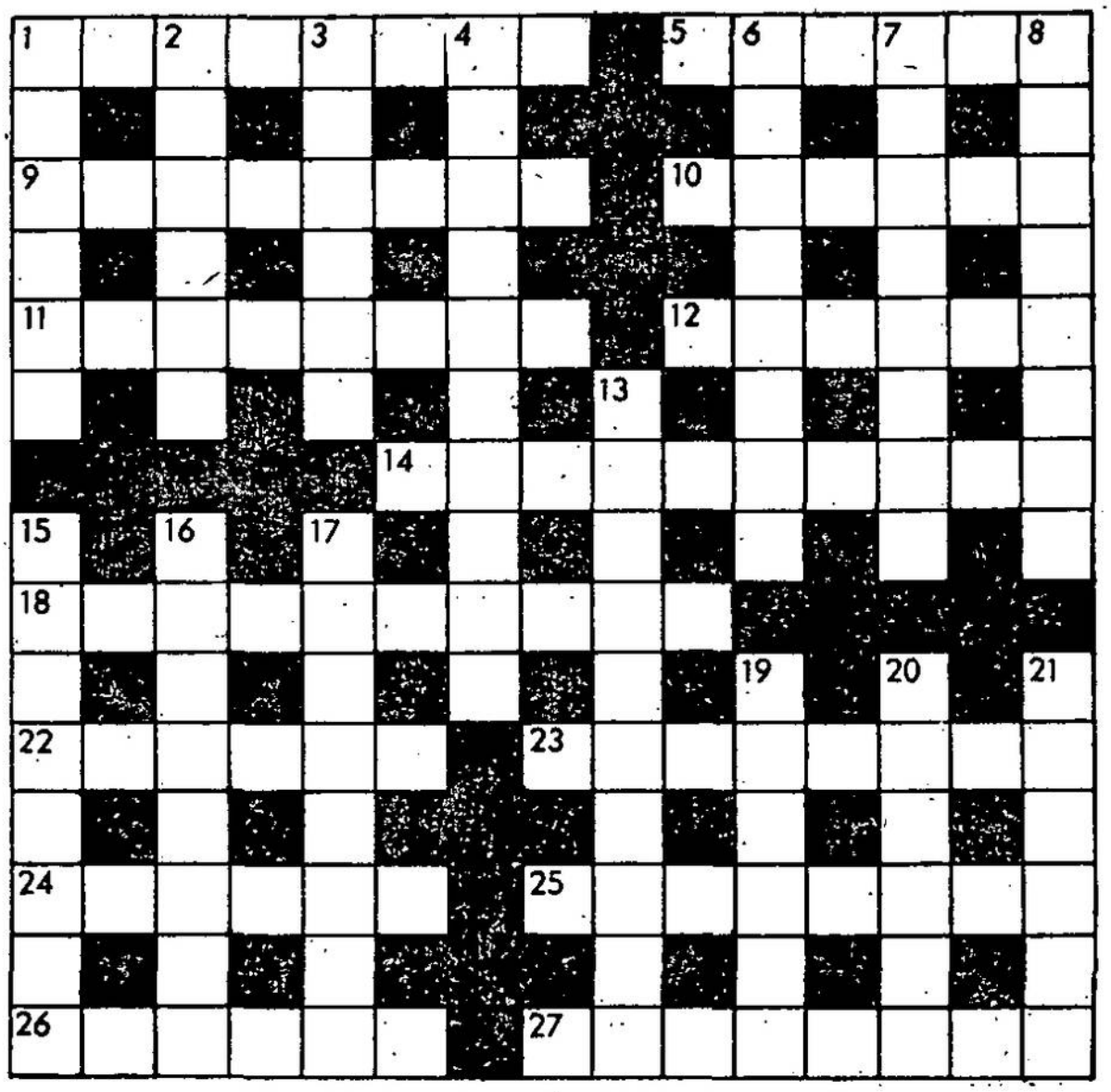
SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

on page 144

Across. 1, *Artifice.* 5, *Scarab.* 9, *Heeltaps.* 10, *Kruger.* 11, *Reverent.* 12, *Monday.* 14, *Malefactor.* 18, *Archimedes.* 22, *Maiden.* 23, *Marigold.* 24, *Ablest.* 25, *Sturgeon.* 26, *Disney.* 27, *Presents.*

Down. 1, *Adhere.* 2, *Twelve.* 3, *Future.* 4, *Copenhagen.* 6, *Corporal.* 7, *Rigidity.* 8, *Barn-yard.* 13, *Benefactor.* 15, *Farm hand.* 16, *Achilles.* 17, *Licensee.* 19, *Mitres.* 20, *Solemn.* 21, *Adonis.*

ARGOSY CROSS-WORD



★

Solution on Page 143

★

CLUES

Across

1 A trick if between art and ice (8).

5 Sacred beetle (6).

9 Heavy water, maybe? (8).

10 Oom Paul to his friends (6).

11 Torn about always holding in respect (8).

12 Day the dynamo goes wrong (6).

14 Gentleman agent gone to the bad? (10).

18 Had a revolutionary idea in his bath (10).

22 Is it cricket to bowl her over? (6).

23 Goes to bed with the sun, Shakespeare said (8).

24 Description of the best seaman? (6).

25 Source of caviare (8).

26 Creator of Donald and Goofy (6).

27 Serpents in acceptable form (8).

Down

1 Take a header and stick (6).

2 It is gross when squared (6).

3 Time to come (6).

4 Home of the Little Mermaid (10).

6 Rank sort of punishment (8).

7 Stiffness itself (8).

8 Source of many a cock-and-bull story (4-4).

13 Antithesis of 14 (10).

15 You'd find him in 8 (4, 4).

16 His heel wouldn't heal (8).

17 Could be mine host (8).

19 See-captains' headgear? (6).

20 "Tuesday's child is ——— and sad" (6).

21 No aids to beauty for him (6).

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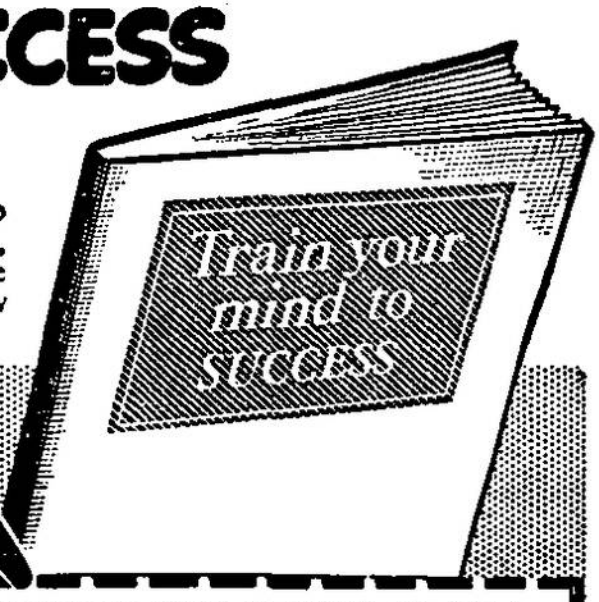

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